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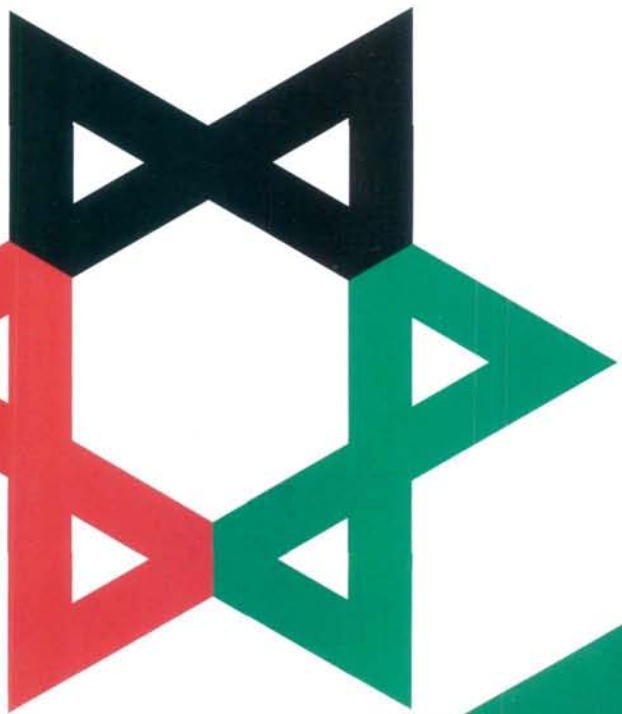

IS ISRAEL FINISHED?

by JEFFREY GOLDBERG

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

TA-NEHISI COATES ON BILL COSBY'S BLACK MAN PROBLEM

JONATHAN RAUCH ON McCAIN'S (TRUE!) CONSERVATISM

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS ON ROTTEN SCHOOLBOYS

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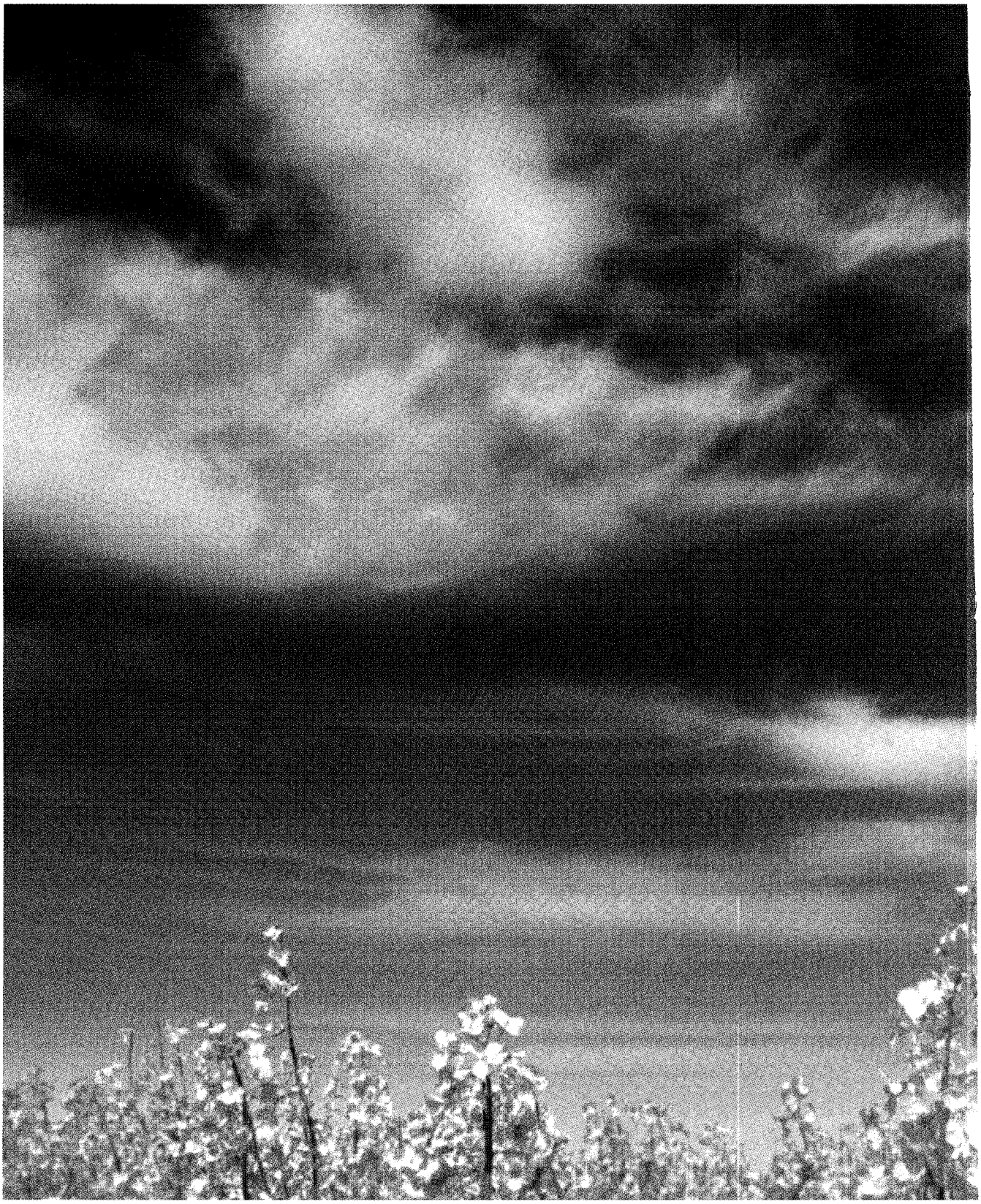

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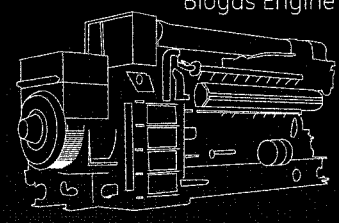

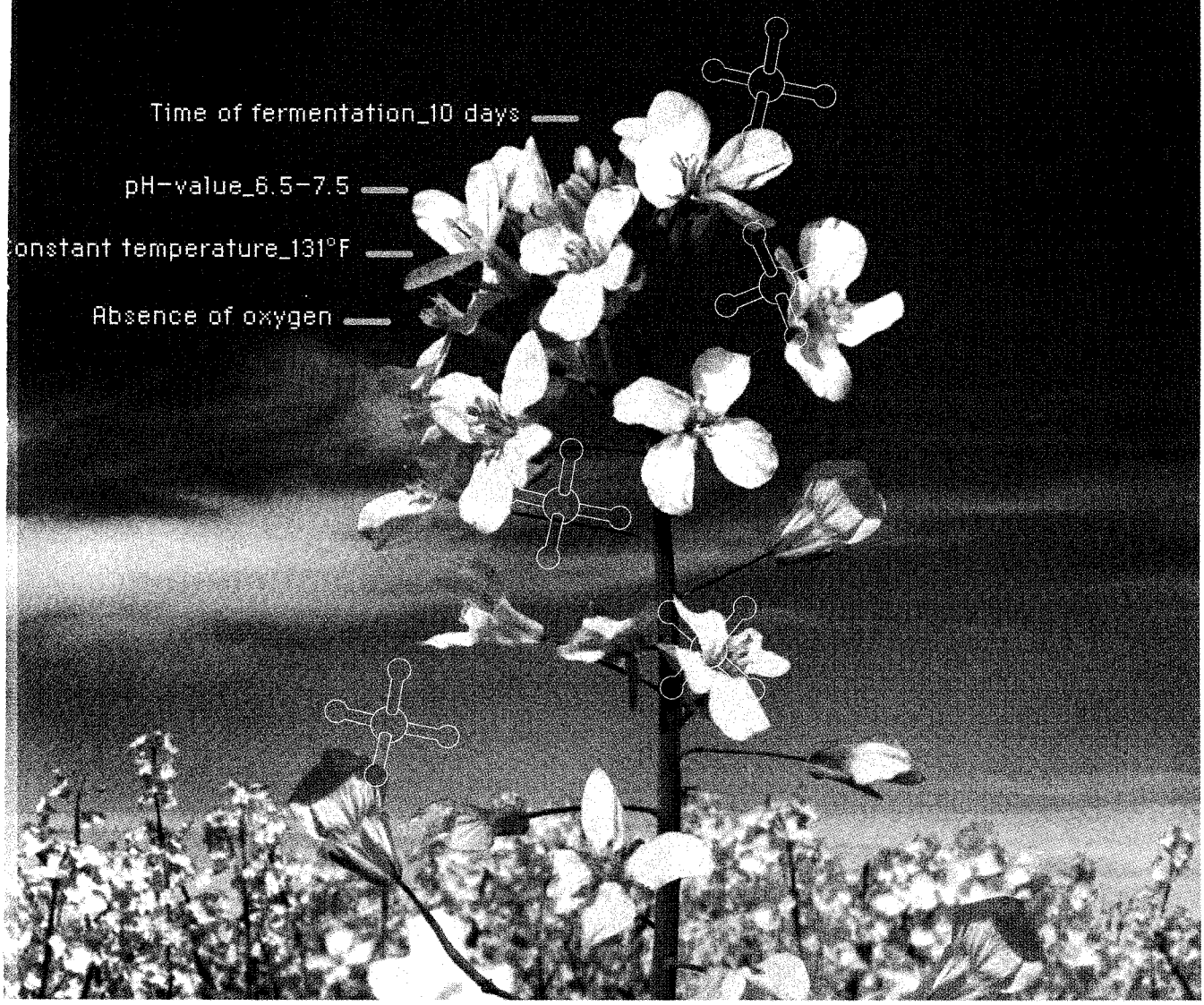

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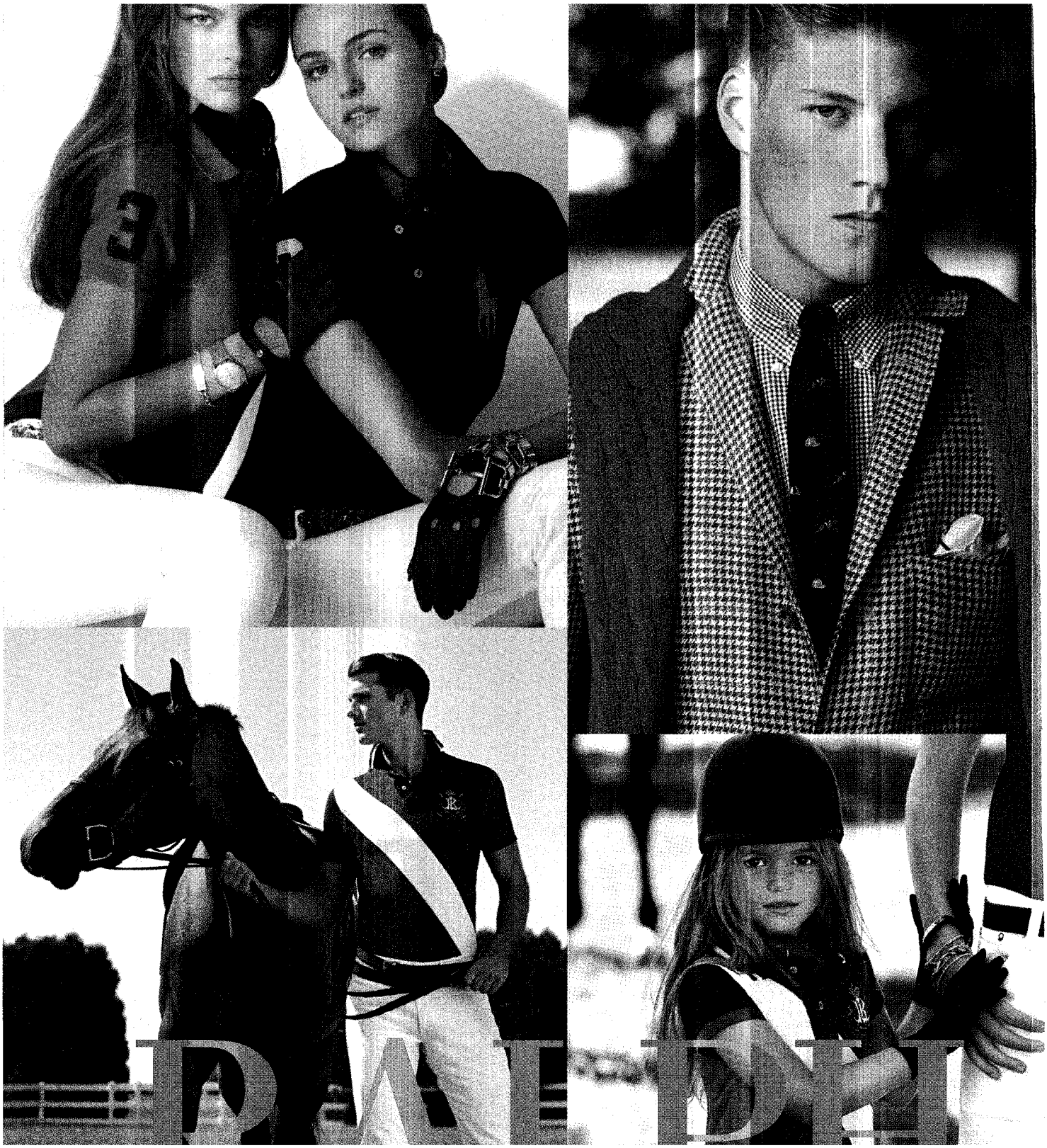

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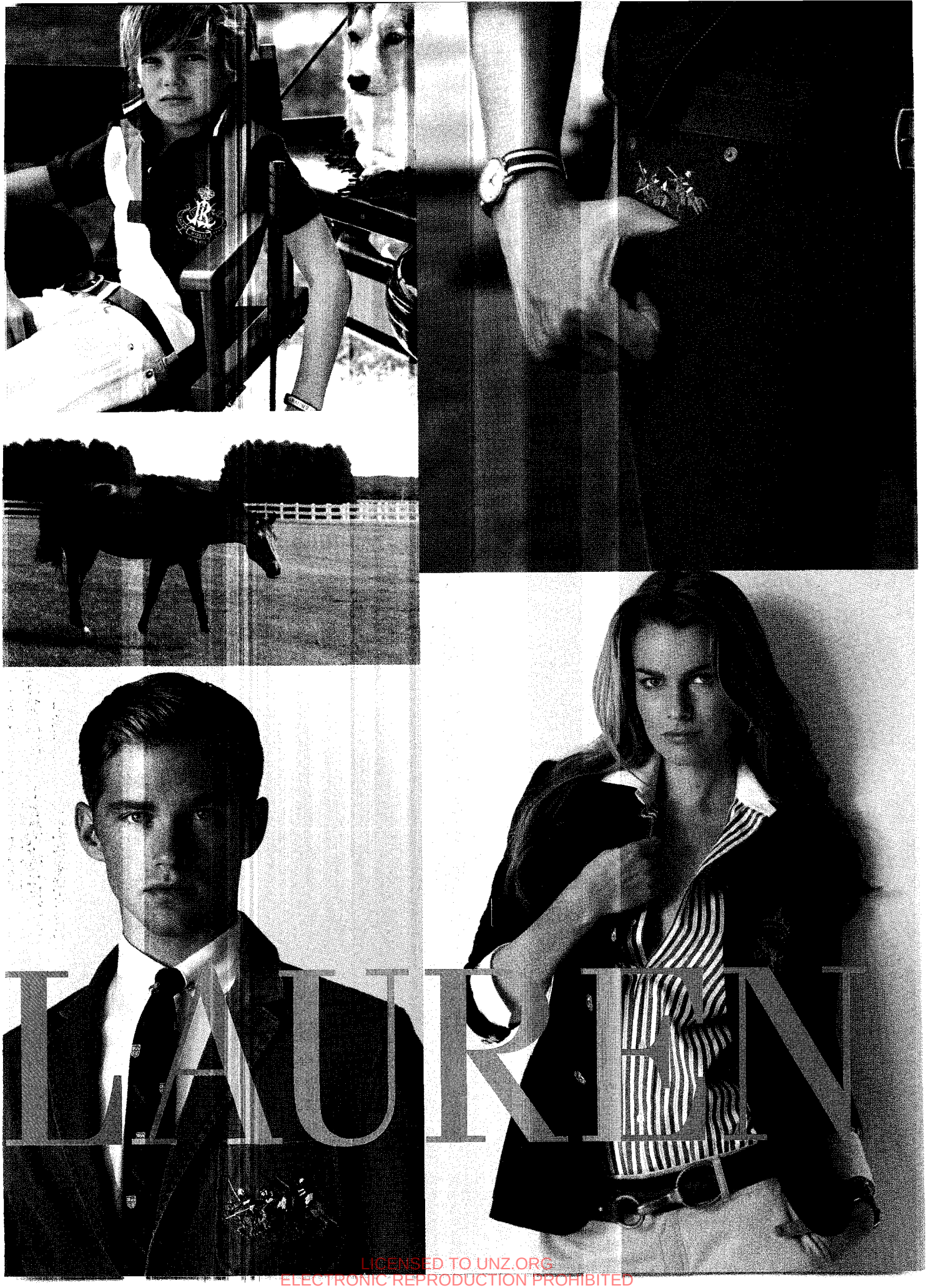

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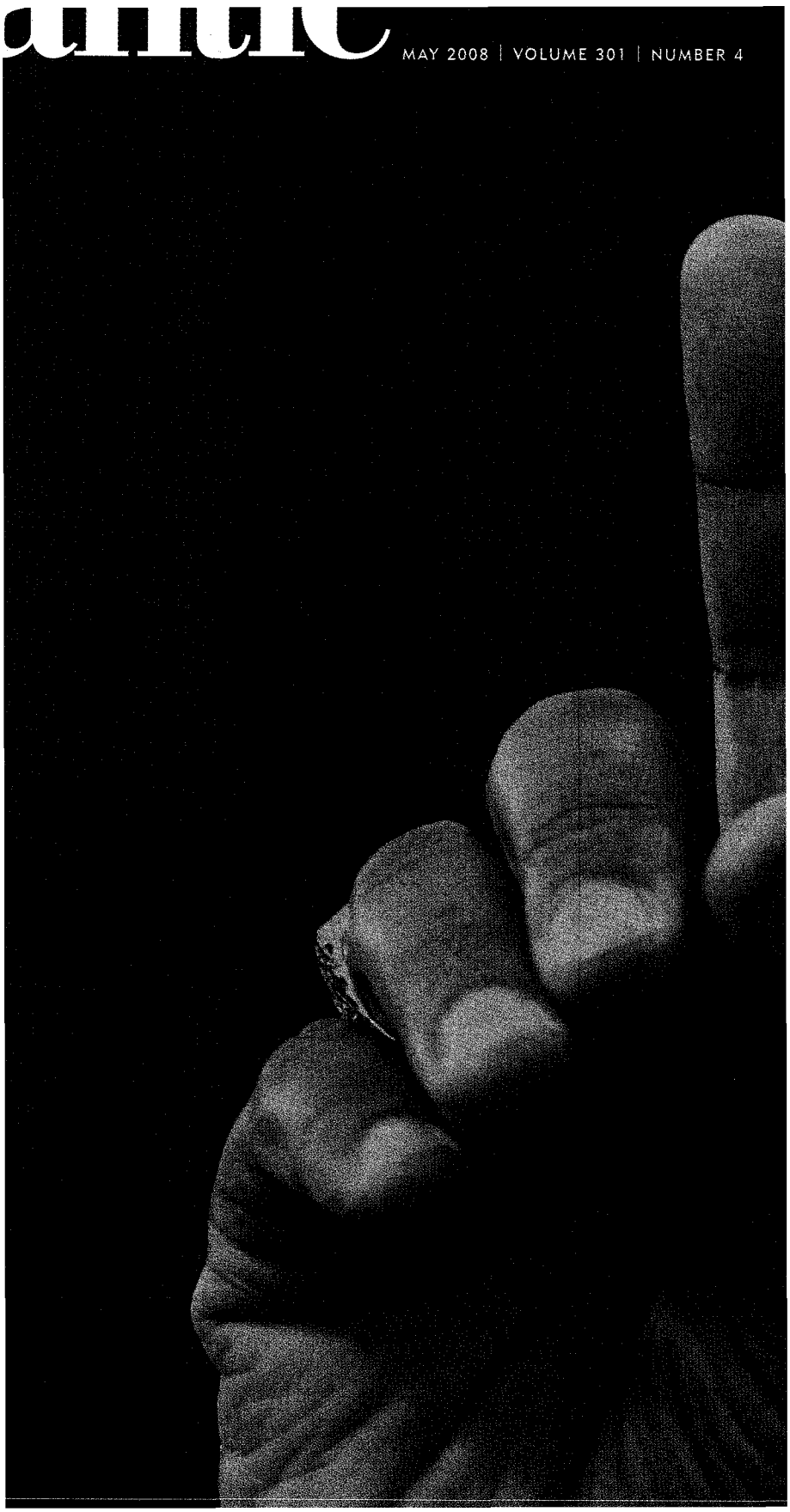

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PHOTO BY DAVID P. GILKEY/ *DETROIT FREE PRESS*

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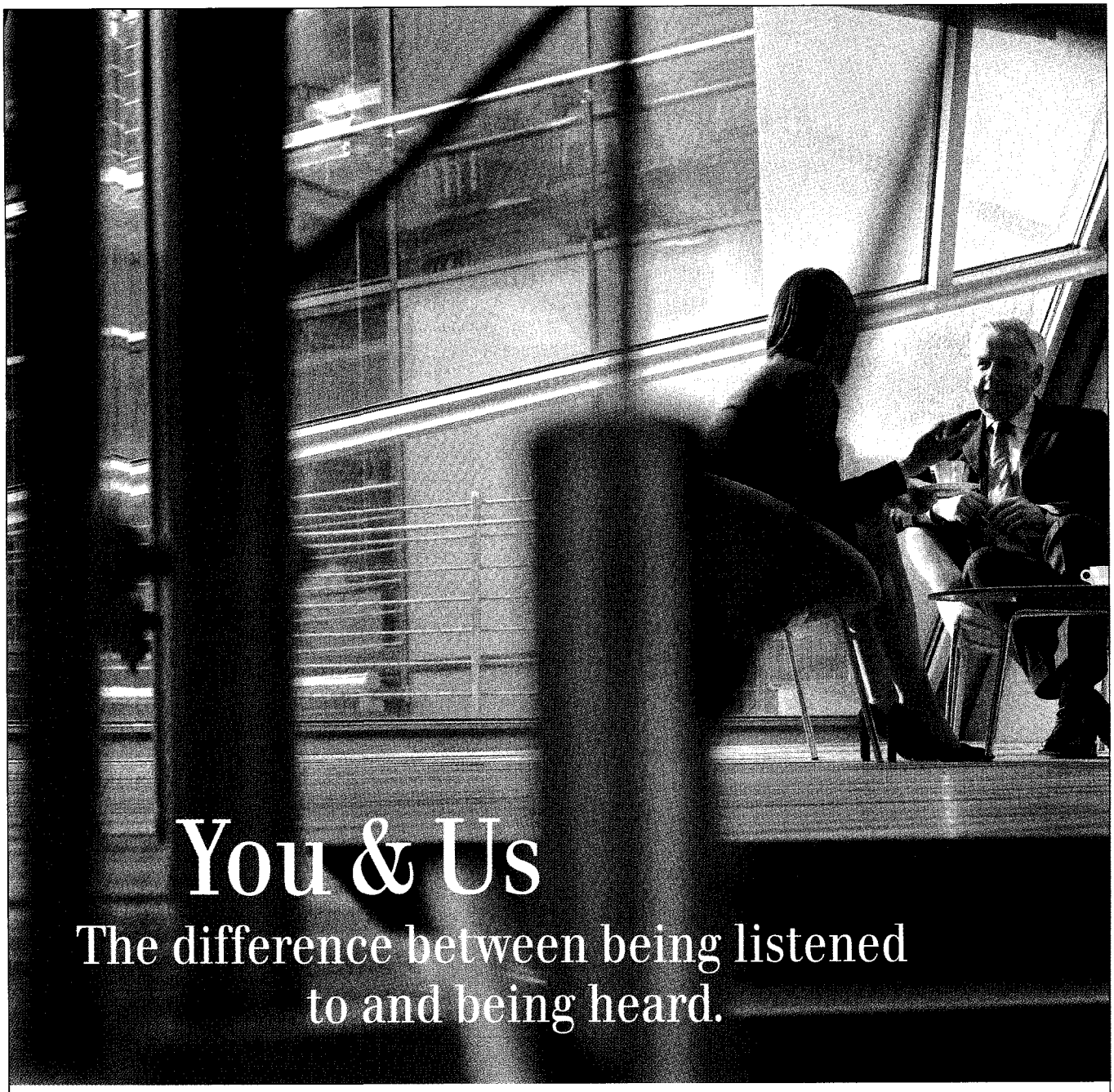

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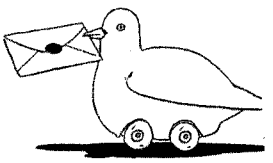

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MR. GOOD ENOUGH

I encourage readers tempted to "settle" and "marry him" after reading Lori Gottlieb's article ("Marry Him," March *Atlantic*) to consider that your children will grow up, need you less as they get older and become more independent, and leave your house one day. As this process occurs, you and your spouse will be left with each other. Before you "settle," ask yourself, *Do I want to spend adult, one-on-one time with this person as the nest empties?* Your answer should be a resounding *Yes!* In fact, not only should you want to spend more time with your spouse as the kids mature, you should look forward to that time.

McAlister Dowd
Lexington, Va.

Given a world where women have many choices about how to live their lives, why does Lori Gottlieb assume every woman shares her obsession with traditional marriage and family? I am single, very far past 30, and have no children. And while I'm old enough to have plenty of regrets, my lack of spouse and kids is not among them. I'm very happy about my single state.

I'd advise women in their 30s to think long and hard about whether they really want to raise children or are considering it only because of hoopla about biological clocks and articles like Gottlieb's telling them that "all" women want marriage and family.

Nancy Jane Moore
Austin, Texas

I think the word *settle* is sticking in people's craw. But Lori Gottlieb is absolutely right. I was 50 when I finally wised up. And the man I married had a lot of problems. But he was like the house we bought two and a half years ago—there was nothing wrong with him that couldn't be fixed. And fix himself he did, mostly. Nine years down the road, he has turned out to be my dream man.

Name withheld
Los Angeles, Calif.

Even though I married a man I fell madly in love with, there is a degree to which I am settling for him now on a daily basis. That's not to say I don't love him dearly, but my love is not accompanied by the electricity and intoxicating rushes of lust I felt for him when we were first together.

Marriage is, as Lori Gottlieb says, a partnership for a mundane, not-for-profit business. Isn't compromise what being faithful is about, anyway? And don't husbands who are faithful essentially settle every day for their wives? We women like to imagine ourselves as goddesses who are worthy of a man's total worship and devotion, and we are incensed when he fails to give us that. Unfortunately, we get bed hair, body odor, wrinkles, thickness in the middle, and bad attitudes. We would not easily excuse such things in men, yet we expect men to overlook them in us.

Laura Parkhurst
Franklin, Ind.

Lori Gottlieb replies:
The writer from Los Angeles is correct that the word settle *might be tripping up some people. When I advised "settling," I was suggesting that many young women have unrealistic expectations of what they "should be feeling" when they meet "The One" (butterflies in the belly! dazzling excitement!). Having been one of those women, I learned the hard way that the Achilles' heels of romantic attraction (looks, charm, success, Hepburn-Tracy banter) aren't what make for a good long-term marriage; more-mundane qualities like friendship and values, on the other hand, are. So I agree with McAlister Dowd that we should marry someone with whom we look forward to sharing the empty nest, but we may not anticipate it with the same kind of romantic excitement we read about in novels or see at the movies. Personally, I'd happily "settle" for that.*

Nancy Jane Moore is right in pointing out that not every woman wants a traditional family, and I should have qualified that in my piece. Given, however, that the vast majority of women do want this, I don't believe the media is responsible for the pervasiveness of this very visceral desire. The biological clock isn't "hoopla"; it's medical fact. And the media is selling neither that biological urge nor the wish for marriage and family; it's selling the idea that you need to feel some kind of divine spark in order to seek marriage and family. Which, paradoxically, results in fewer marriages and more single women.

Perhaps if the views of readers like Laura Parkhurst and the writer from Los Angeles were what young women heard more often, the word settle *would have a more positive connotation (as in "settle down" in a contented way) than the one that has engendered such a heated response, in the blogosphere and elsewhere.*

COMPETING FOR BELIEVERS

Eliza Griswold provides a telling glimpse of how societies manipulate religious faith to suit their own worldly preferences ("God's Country," March *Atlantic*). No one should be shocked at how Nigerian religious leaders justify violence against each other; any honest reading of the Bible or Koran will reveal innumerable calls for violence against nonbelievers. Similarly, we in the West have, for centuries, lengthened the list of explicit biblical injunctions we choose to ignore to suit our modern worldviews.

Unfortunately, history teaches us that gods do not save people—people do. The grim conflict in Nigeria is really fueled by poverty, disease, and its people's

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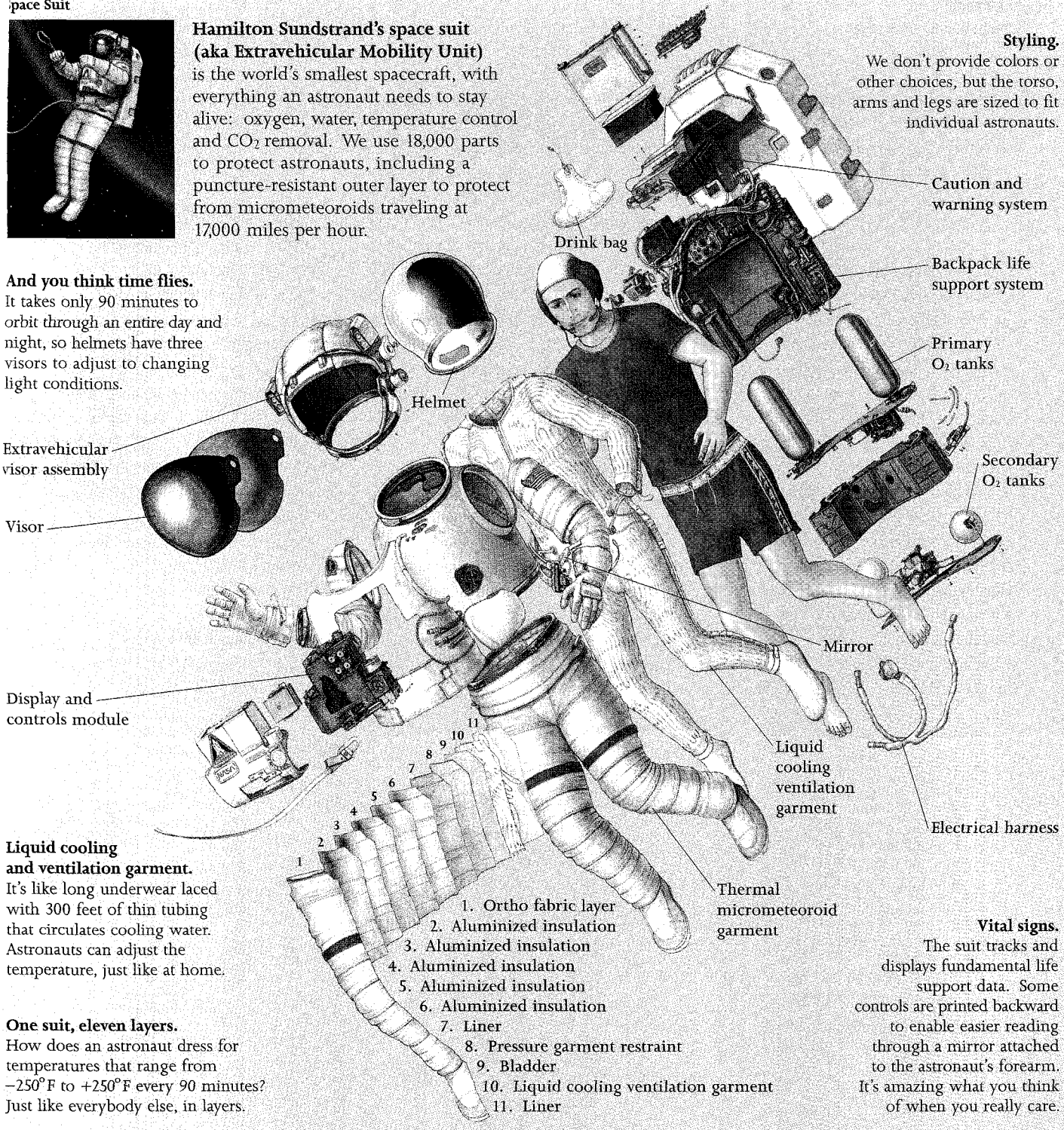

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9. Bladder
10. Liquid cooling ventilation garment
11. Liner

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abandonment by a failed and corrupt oil-rich government; these ailments will be solved first and foremost by political revolution, not through prayer.

J. Blair Reeves Jr.
Chapel Hill, N.C.

ON ANTI-SEMITISM

Christopher Hitchens is quibbling to no good effect in asserting ("The 2,000-Year-Old Panic," March *Atlantic*) that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* should be called a "fabrication" ("based on medieval Christian fantasies about Judaism") rather than a "forgery" because a forgery is a "counterfeit of a true bill." The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives several meanings of *forgery*, one of which is "invention ... fictitious invention, fiction," and defines *fabrication* as "an invention ... a forgery," so the words can be used interchangeably. But to suppose that the *Protocols* were invented based on medieval fantasies is to give the Okhrana undeserved credit for both originality and historical research. Passages in the *Protocols* were plagiarized word for word from a political satire published in Geneva in 1864 imagining a dialogue in hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, with probable additional borrowings from a novel published a few years later describing a meeting of a rabbinical cabal plotting to conquer the world by trickery. When Czar Nicholas II, a notorious anti-Semite, was informed that the pamphlet was a tendentious concoction, he is reported to have ordered copies confiscated because "a good cause cannot be defended by dirty means."

Sanford Lakoff
San Diego, Calif.

The reproduction of a front page of *Der Stürmer* accompanying Christopher Hitchens's review was identified as having been published in 1933. The first sentence of the front-page article in *Der Stürmer*, however, states that "in March of this year the Führer, in a matter of hours, created the Greater German Reich" when he annexed Austria. That event took place in March 1938.

Harry Piotrowski
Crofton, Md.

CHOOSING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Sandra Tsing Loh, in her review of Jonathan Kozol's *Letters to a Young Teacher* ("Tales Out of School," March *Atlantic*), asks how many children of *Harper's Magazine* staffers attend elite private schools.

The only editor at *Harper's Magazine* with school-age children is the chief editor, Roger D. Hodge. Hodge, who edits Mr Kozol's work at the magazine, has two sons who attend public school in Brooklyn.

Giulia Melucci
Vice President, Public Relations
Harper's Magazine
New York, N.Y.

Sandra Tsing Loh replies:
I think that's wonderful! What a great example for all journalists.

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IN DEFENSE OF SCHOOL BOARDS

Matt Miller's article ("First, Kill All the School Boards," January/February *Atlantic*) is a one-sided account of the state of American education. Education reform is alive and well, led by dedicated school boards whose main focus is increasing student achievement.

Public opinion suggests that Americans are not only satisfied with, but connected to, their local schools. When they want change in their schools, do they go to Washington? No. They take their concerns to their local school-board meeting—to the representatives elected by the community, in the community.

The "powerful school-board associations" that Miller cites do not exist to be a burr under the saddle of public officials. For the most part, school-board members are determined and enthusiastic about improving their skills. In fact, the National School Boards Association offers training and professional-development opportunities to attract and empower school-board members to do their jobs better and to ensure their work remains relevant and meaningful.

Miller also asserts that No Child Left Behind is responsible for the creation of state standards. It is not. State standards were created long before NCLB, and the great majority of those standards clearly outline what students need to know in the major K–12 subject areas. Teaching to those standards, rather than focusing solely on reading and math (the focus of and cause for school sanctions under NCLB) is what drives real reform.

Norm Wooten
President, NSBA
Kodiak, Alaska

Regarding Matt Miller's article: in 1843, Prussia had a king but no kaiser; a German empire came to be only in 1871.

Dainis Bisenieks
Philadelphia, Pa.

Matt Miller replies:

I appreciate Norm Wooten's perspective and respect the understandable instinct of school boards to defend their role. I would note, however, that in the 25 years since the publication of A Nation at Risk, *local school boards have basically been in charge, yet today, America outspends nearly every advanced nation on schooling while scoring in the middle to the bottom of relevant international comparisons. Also, Wooten is silent on the two main substantive issues that I argued needed a greater federal role: remedying America's drastic inequities in school finance and ensuring that all students are educated to a common American standard, not to standards that vary wildly according to where a child happens to have been born. Finally, I did not assert that No Child Left Behind was responsible for creating state standards, only that it imposed new requirements on states in this regard.*

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Magda J. Perez

Transmission Technician Valve Body Area

Johnnie R. Batts

Hybrid 2-Mode Transmission Coordinator

GM

* The 2008 2-mode hybrids are estimated to have a 25 percent or more combined fuel economy improvement over current Chevrolet Tahoe and GMC Yukon models.

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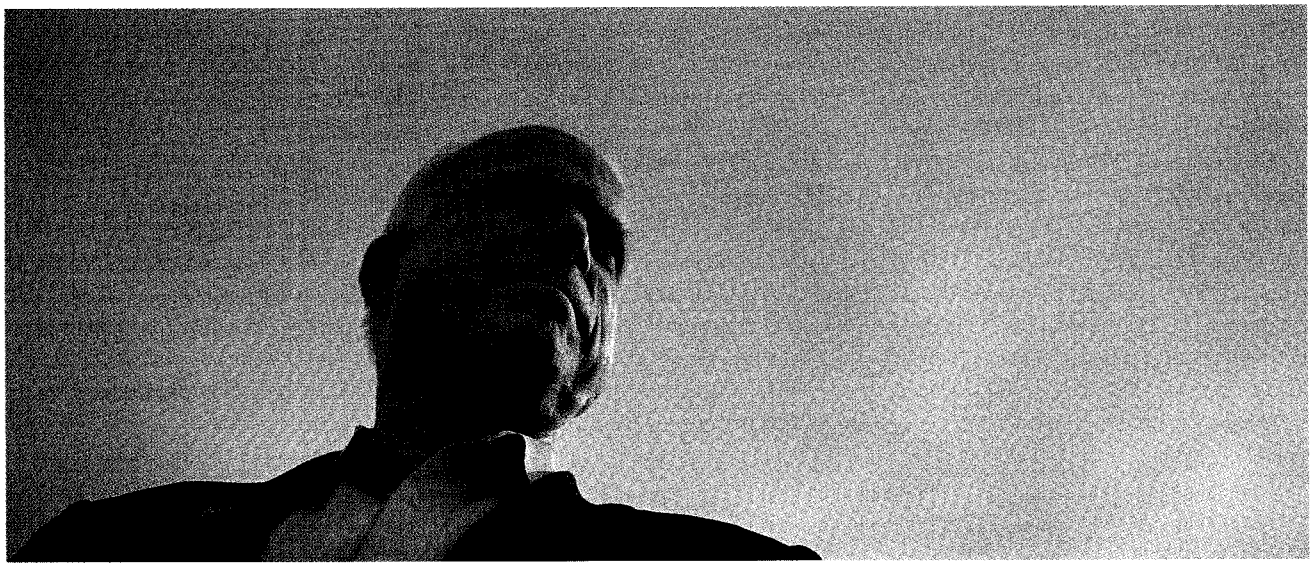

JIM YOUNG/REUTERS/CORBIS

COMMENT

John McCain hasn't betrayed conservatism; his party has.

Mr. Conservative

BY JONATHAN RAUCH

Alert Washingtonians were treated to an odd juxtaposition not long ago. John McCain was booed at the Conservative Political Action Conference, the big annual gathering of the right-wing tribes, while trying to establish that he was a conservative. On the same day, across town at the American Enterprise Institute—another conservative stronghold—Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, was warmly received when he touted a new book called *Real Change*. Never one to go underboard, Gingrich called for "explosively replac[ing] the failed bureaucracies of the past."

The irony of the contrast seemed lost on conservatives. No one in the movement doubts Gingrich is a real, no-kidding conservative. Many doubt that McCain is. Some flatly flunk him. Thus spake James Dobson, the head of Focus on the Family and a leader of the Christian right: "I am convinced Senator McCain is not a conservative." He's not one of us, these conservatives have insisted.

Actually, they're not one of them. But he is.

If the booers had paid attention to McCain's speech, they might have noticed several mentions of Ronald Reagan. No surprise there. But McCain also went out of his way to invoke another conservative luminary, pointedly quoting him twice. That was Edmund Burke.

Burke is the father of modern conservatism, and still its wisest oracle. Tradition-minded but (contrary to stereotype) far from reactionary, he believed in balancing individual rights with social order. The best way to do that, for Burke, was by respecting long-standing customs and institutions while advancing toward liberty and equality. Society's traditions, after all, embody an evolved collective wisdom that even (or especially) the smartest of individuals cannot hope to understand comprehensively, much less reinvent successfully.

The Burkean outlook takes individual rights seriously, and understands that civic order serves no purpose if its result is oppression or misery. It also understands that social stability, far from being endangered by institutional change, positively depends upon it. Burkeans no more believe in a golden past than they do in a perfect future. For them, the question is not whether society should change, but how.

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Burke himself was an advocate of change; he sympathized with the American revolution (while famously denouncing the much more radical French one), proposed curtailing the slave trade, and fought tirelessly to reform the corrupt and monopolistic British East India Company. But he believed change should take a measured pace and should try to follow well-worn social grooves rather than cutting across them. Above all, he abhorred utopian reformers, who, by disdaining real-world constraints and overestimating their own intelligence, invariably worsen what they seek to improve.

Burke speaks as much to the conservative temperament as to conservative ideas. He would be suspicious of a conservatism that wanted to "explosively replace the failed bureaucracies of the past." He would caution against forcibly uprooting the authority structures of a long-tyrannized society like Iraq and expecting a mini-America to spring forth. He would be all for "the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world" (as per President Bush's second inaugural address), but he would put more emphasis on *ultimate*.

If Burke were around today, he might paraphrase Reagan's famous witticism about the Democratic Party: Burke didn't leave the conservative movement; it left him. Starting with Barry Goldwater's campaign of 1964, American conservatism repositioned itself as a revolutionary movement, intent on uprooting illegitimate and ineffective liberal structures. Partly this grew from a canny assessment that Eisenhower-style Republicanism had played into liberals' hands, consolidating instead of confronting the welfare state. Partly, however, it grew from narcissism: no less than their left-wing peers, right-wing Baby Boomers liked to suppose it was their destiny to reshape the world.

And so conservatives came to associate themselves with a romantic narrative of radical change—a narrative of counter-revolution, but revolutionary all the same. They trumpeted the Reagan Revolution, then Gingrich's Republican Revolution. In 2001, George W. Bush came to office disdainful of "small ball," determined to be a "transformative" figure. In the 2008 presidential race, Mike Huckabee railed against corporate greed, promised to abolish the Internal Revenue Service, and pledged (fancifully) to bring about "energy independence" (whatever that is) by the end of his second term; yet his conservative credentials met with less skepticism among the rank and file than did McCain's. Nowadays, the harder core of the movement barely gives politicians the time of day unless they renounce incremental reform in favor of the root-and-branch variety, and denounce government with a stridency that owes less to Burke than to the New Left.

> Clinton and Obama have sounded more conservative than many Republicans.

Burke would have wondered at this. And in 2008 he might have noticed that, if conservatism is as much a temperament as it is any particular set of policies, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, both Democrats, have sounded more conservative than many Republicans. Both have agreed, for instance, on the need for health-care reform, but Clinton has emphasized her hard-learned lesson that change needs to be incremental, and Obama has said that a single-payer system would make sense if we were starting from scratch but that getting there from here would be "impractical"—a Burkean way to talk about change.

And then there is McCain. As eclectic a reformer as he has been in the Senate, he has been consistent in his incrementalism. Though he was known to sound hot-headed on campaign-finance reform, his legislative work produced a reform that was mostly modest in its aims and that mostly attained them. He has been an old-fashioned budget balancer, not a newfangled supply-sider. He defends his global-warming efforts as gradualist and as modeled on emissions-trading systems that have already been tested. In the presidential primaries, he showed little interest in grandiose promises.

Indeed, some of what his detractors view as inconsistencies display a distinctly Burkean logic. McCain opposes gay marriage but also voted against a federal constitutional amendment to ban it. Inconsistent? Not if you think that marriage is best handled by the states, which have handled it since Colonial times, or that there is nothing conservative about preemptively amending the Constitution to end-run the Supreme Court, a stratagem future liberals could have all kinds of fun with.

McCain voted against Bush's big tax cuts, but now says he supports extending them rather than risking damage to the economy. Flip-flop? Not if you believe, as Burkeans often do, that sudden and large policy changes deserve skepticism, but that when a policy becomes well established and woven into everyday life, as the tax cuts have, continuity should get the benefit of the doubt.

In the face of resistance from Bush and his own party, McCain fought heroically for a law restraining harsh treatment of terror-war detainees, yet more recently he voted against legislation imposing on the Central Intelligence Agency the same stringent ban on coercive interrogation that the U.S. Army observes. Hypocrisy? Not if you believe that brutal interrogation methods should be illegal, but that holding the CIA to the military's white-glove constraints, even in emergencies, goes too far the other way.

McCain, in short, is an antirevolutionary, not a counterrevolutionary. No wonder, then, he invoked Burke twice to an audience of skeptical conservatives—or, perhaps more accurately, skeptical "conservatives." And no wonder some of them booed. To movement conservatives, McCain represented heresy. But to the conservative movement, he represented a return to home truth.

Jonathan Rauch is an *Atlantic* correspondent.

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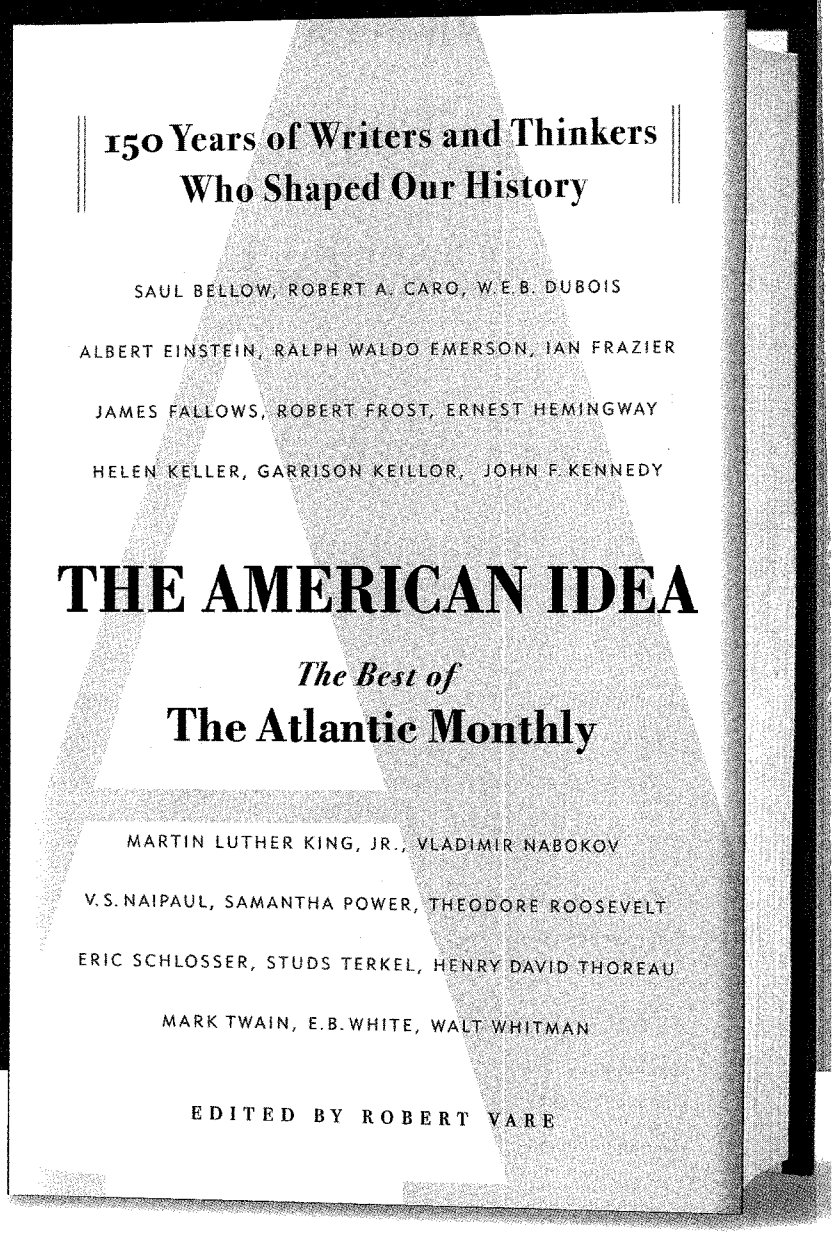

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Calendar

What to watch for in the weeks ahead

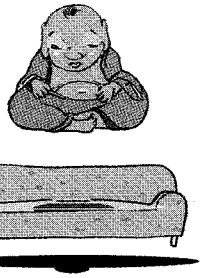
COMPILED BY MATTHEW QUIRK

MAY 5 Trial Run

Military commissions at Guantánamo are scheduled to ramp up with today's trial of Omar Khadr, a Canadian national accused of killing a U.S. medic in Afghanistan with a grenade in 2002, when he was 15. Charges against 9/11 plotters, including accused mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, should follow soon.

MAY 9 Candid Camera

R. Kelly, the Grammy-winning R&B crooner of such hits as "Feelin' on Yo Booty," goes on trial today on child-pornography charges stemming from his alleged appearance with an underage girl on a sexually explicit videotape.



MAY 19 Ouch Potato

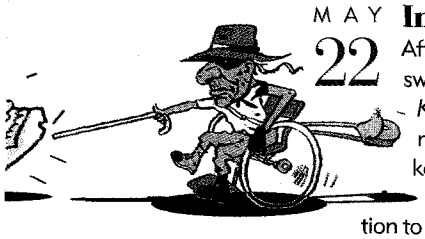
Nintendo releases Wii Fit today, a health-themed game for the Wii video-game console that users control with a special "balance board." Wii will tell players whether they're obese and will track their movements while leading them through exercises, including yoga and push-ups. In addition to keeping Nintendo the king of the casual-gaming sphere, Wii Fit could challenge the stereotype of gamers as couch potatoes.

MAY 19 Bombs Away

Representatives of more than 100 nations are scheduled to meet in Dublin today to hammer out a treaty banning cluster bombs. The controversial munitions scatter bomblets across a wide area and these can detonate years later, maiming civilians. Today's summit is expected to include states that have produced and stockpiled the bombs. Organizers hope the treaty will help persuade holdouts—like China, Russia, and the U.S.—to eventually prohibit the weapons as well.

MAY 20 Movie Mecca

Movie theaters are illegal in Saudi Arabia, but that won't stop the country's first annual film festival. The five-day, government-approved event will feature selections from Saudi auteurs and their counterparts in other Arab states.



MAY 22 Indiana Jones and the Stolen Spoilers

After a two-decade hiatus, Hollywood unearths its favorite swashbuckling archaeologist for *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. This time he'll fight Soviets, not Nazis. Beyond that, details are thin. In an effort to keep the plot secret, executives have sued a loose-lipped extra and helped police launch a successful sting operation to recover photos stolen from the studio's production office.

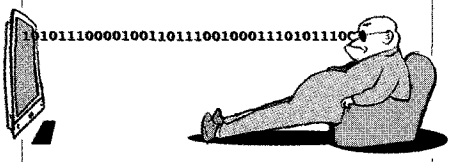
MAY 30 Paper for Plastic

It's the last day to benefit from a $336 million settlement with credit-card companies that, plaintiffs claim, imposed hidden exchange fees of 1 to 3 percent on purchases made in a foreign currency. Anyone who used a credit or debit card abroad between 1996 and 2006 may be eligible for a $25 refund—more if they can show how much they spent.

MAY 31 Mao for Your Money

The World Bank gets a new chief economist today—from Communist China. Justin Yifu Lin, considered one of China's premier economic minds, defected from Taiwan in 1979 (by swimming), before studying under the free-market idealists at the University of Chicago. The bank expects Lin to provide much-needed experience with developing countries.

ISTVAN BANYAI

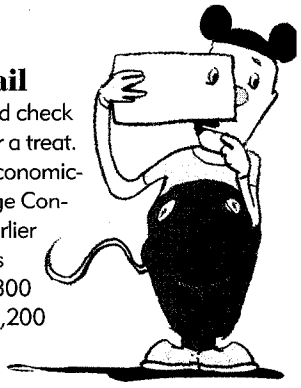


MAY 31 Peace in HD

Because of Warner Bros.' decision to officially stop producing movies in HD DVD as of today, Blu-ray will be the last one standing in the high-definition-format wars. Toshiba, HD DVD's developer, was forced to concede defeat after the studio opted to abandon the technology. Retailers hope that consumers who have been waiting for a winner to emerge will finally embrace high-definition discs.

ALSO IN MAY

The Check Is in the Mail



Taxpayers should check their mailbox for a treat. As part of the economic-stimulus package Congress passed earlier this year, checks ranging from $300 to more than $1,200 should start arriving this month. Some economists worry that the money will come too late to head off a recession. Expect few complaints from recipients.

Electoral Fraud

Burma holds a referendum on a new constitution that may help secure the ruling junta's power. Multiparty elections are slated to be held in 2010; opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party clearly won the last election, in 1990, remains under house arrest.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Autocracy on the March

Even a casual observer of the Arab world knows that democracy has made little headway in the region in recent years. According to a new report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, that won't change anytime soon. While talk of political reform echoes in some Arab countries, and while others inch toward openness and democracy, the authors argue that such advances are little more than a front for preserving the power of authoritarians—and for propping up their economies. "The goal has not been democratization but modernization," the study says, "both as a genuine attempt to improve the quality and efficiency of governance and as a cosmetic device to make the system look better and thus be more acceptable." Morocco, for instance, has expanded human rights and made limited electoral reforms while leaving power "firmly in the hands of the king." Other Arab autocrats have publicly tolerated opposition parties while working behind the scenes to divide or discredit them. Even in countries where reformists have reached important positions, "they have yet to attain control of real levers of power." But real progress toward democracy in the Middle East, like free elections, could bring Islamist groups to power, as happened with Hamas in Palestine two years ago. The U.S. and Europe, the authors argue, will therefore continue to support limited top-down reform, and power in the Arab world will remain "in the hands of kings and presidents."

—"Incumbent Regimes and the 'King's Dilemma' in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform," Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

IT'S GOOD to be the king. Permanently.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em

Can smoking cigarettes actually *save* lives? When some state and local governments banned smoking in bars, the number of fatal car accidents involving drunk drivers rose by about 13 percent, two economists recently showed. In the most extreme result, they found that fatal accidents in Jefferson County, Colorado, increased by more than 40 percent after neighboring Boulder County instituted a ban. Although a portion of the smoking population simply stays at home to drink after bans are enacted, the researchers argue that many other smokers seek out bars in locales where simultaneously imbibing and inhaling remains legal. Given the greater distance to a bar in a neighboring county or state, the authors surmise that smokers in towns with bans log more drunk-miles, leading to more alcohol-related accidents. Growing evidence from neurological research also suggests that smoking lessens a drinker's level of intoxication, and that nicotine deprivation can sharpen the urge to drink. As a result, the authors say, smokers who comply with the ban and elect to booze close to home may be drinking more, or getting more drunk from the same number of drinks. While a national smoking ban could offset some of the increase in fatalities, perhaps alcohol, like coffee, is simply best (and safest) when enjoyed with cigarettes.

—"Drunk Driving After the Passage of Smoking Bans in Bars," Scott Adams and Chad Cotti, Journal of Public Economics

SOCIETY

Middling Through

What's the saddest time in life? The trials of adolescence? The decline of old age? According to a recent study, for most people it's middle age. Studying data on 500,000 Americans and Europeans, the researchers consistently found a "turning point" in midlife: happiness falls as we progress from youth into middle age, bottoms out in our 40s, and then rises again into the golden years. The authors estimate that American men are least happy at age 49, and American women at age 45. The decrease in happiness between ages 20 and 45 equals about one-third of the drop a person would report after losing a job. A range of theories may explain this "U-shaped curve." Perhaps older people can better count their blessings, or maybe they know themselves better in maturity and can "adapt to their strengths and weaknesses" without getting carried away by the dreams of youth. The data suggest that rather than buying a Harley to shake the midlife blues, 40-somethings might head to Europe: while Americans have grown grimmer over the past century, Europeans report feeling happier and happier.

—"Is Well-Being U-Shaped Over the Life Cycle?," David G. Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald, National Bureau of Economic Research

TOP: ANDREA COMAS/REUTERS/CORBIS; LEFT: NAJLAH FEANNY/CORBIS SABA

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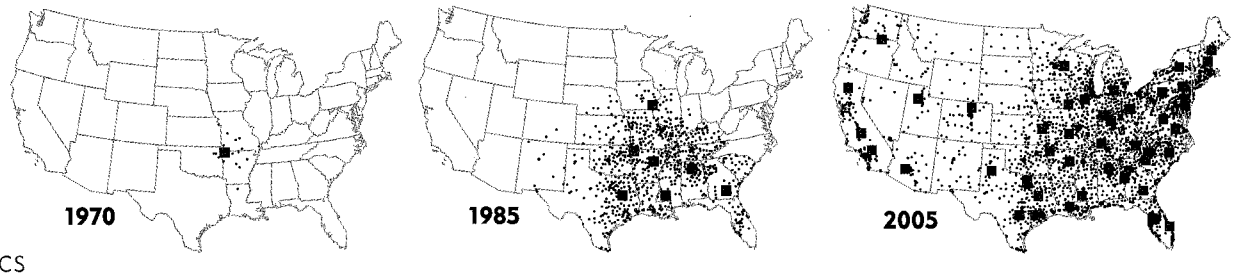
Concentration and Conquest

- *Wal-Mart stores*
- *General distribution centers*



ECONOMICS

Manifest Density

The secret of Wal-Mart's success may also be its Achilles' heel. Thomas J. Holmes, an economist at the University of Minnesota, found that as Wal-Mart started colonizing the U.S. retail market, in the 1960s, it methodically expanded outward from its base in Arkansas, keeping its stores close together. When Holmes measured the effects of this "economy of density," he found that although the strategy was key in boosting Wal-Mart's enormous profits, growth opportunities are now limited, as the company has essentially exhausted its ability to expand. Building stores in tight clusters saves money by keeping trucking costs down and helping the company respond to shifts in demand. But those stores also tend to cannibalize each other's sales. The author estimates that existing Wal-Marts cut sales at new stores by about 10 percent on average. That overlap hurts, but the cost of spacing stores farther apart is astronomical. Moving a store 100 miles from a distribution center can raise its yearly costs by more than $500,000. If every Wal-Mart store moved 100 miles farther from its distributor, total costs would go up by at least $1 billion a year. The author also points out that Wal-Mart can no longer simply spread to new turf at will. Its attempts to conquer urban markets have foundered, not only because of higher property costs and stronger unions, but also because greater population density hurts the company's bottom line. In rural areas where Wal-Mart is the only game in town, erecting a store five miles from a population center barely affects demand. But in larger urban areas with more stores to choose from, those five miles would cut demand by 80 percent. People who fear that yellow smiling faces will one day rule America can take solace: even Wal-Mart has its limits.

—"The Diffusion of Wal-Mart and Economies of Density," Thomas J. Holmes, National Bureau of Economic Research

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CRIME

A Working Girl Can't Win

Prostitutes make good money, a new study argues—but not enough to offset the risks the job involves. The economist Steven D. Levitt and the sociologist Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh sent researchers into the streets of Chicago to record how much prostitutes earn and to assess the hazards they face. Analyzing Chicago Police Department data on prostitution arrests, the authors argue that paying for sex in some ways resembles paying for any other service on the open market. Almost half of prostitution-related arrests were made on just 0.3 percent of the 25,000 city blocks surveyed, and prostitution incidents tended to occur along major streets—suggesting that prostitutes, like other retailers, need to display their wares in concentrated and consistent locations where potential consumers congregate.

As far as sales are concerned, the setup seems to work: the prostitutes surveyed over a two-year period averaged $27 an hour, or about $300 to $400 a week. Women reporting to a pimp fared even better. Although they had to hand over 25 percent of their earnings, they still made roughly 50 percent more than women without pimps. Compared with the wages these women could earn in retail sales, hairstyling, or babysitting (from $67 to $145 per week), prostitution looks like a much better deal. But the authors suggest that the dangers of the job outweigh the financial incentives. Not only did prostitutes engage in sexual acts without a condom 75 percent of the time, they also were the victims of abuse by clients or pimps once a month on average.

—"An Empirical Analysis of Street-Level Prostitution," Steven D. Levitt (University of Chicago) and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh (Columbia University)

TERRORISM

Fight Club

Hezbollah is known for its cult of martyrdom, but also for providing a range of social services, like hospitals and schools. Two researchers think that those services are a key to the group's success—and to its deadliness. Like many other terror outfits, including Hamas and the Taliban, Hezbollah works like a club, requiring membership dues in the form of religious observances. The authors point out that in the shadow war of insurgency, such clubs face no greater danger than defection. The groups protect themselves by encouraging extreme "signals" of religious loyalty among their members, like tight dietary restrictions and material sacrifice. This loyalty is reinforced when the club provides benefits like education, health care, and security. With less fear of defection, clubs can more confidently attack high-value targets and are more likely to use suicide bombers. The authors note that Hamas, which offers social services to Palestinians, averages 5.9 fatalities per attack. Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which shares Hamas's jihadist ideology but not its commitment to welfare, averages only 2.9. Hezbollah kills 5.0 people per strike—a far higher rate than for any group that fails to provide for its followers.

—"Religion, Terrorism and Public Goods: Testing the Club Model," Eli Berman and David D. Laitin, National Bureau of Economic Research

PSYCHOLOGY

Confessions of a Non-Dangerous Mind

The best way to get someone to confess to a crime may be to make a kindly suggestion of guilt—even if the suspect is innocent. Three researchers gathered 219 students and asked them to take a typing test. The subjects sat at computers and typed out letters read aloud by the experimenter. Some of the participants were warned that if they pressed the Alt key, the program would crash and all the data would be lost. The system was rigged so it would shut down after the experimenter asked the participants to type the Z key (which sits just to the left of the Alt key). The experimenter then interviewed the volunteers individually and asked each to sign a statement admitting he or she had ruined the test. "Don't worry," the experimenter said. "You didn't mean to hit the Alt key. Several participants so far have pressed the Alt key during this task. Are you sure you didn't press it?" Seventy percent of the participants—all innocent—eventually confessed. The professors then repeated the experiment, substituting the Esc key for the Alt key. But since the Esc key sits much farther away from the Z key, only 23 percent of participants admitted to hitting it. The more plausible the alleged act, the authors conclude, the likelier the false confession. The study also found that participants in both tests who were interrogated in a more intimidating manner ("It looks like the entire project may be delayed now. Why did you press the key?") were less likely to falsely admit to the offense, suggesting that a light hand may be the best way to elicit a false confession.

—"Effects of Personality, Interrogation Techniques and Plausibility in an Experimental False Confession Paradigm," Jessica R. Klaver, Zina Lee, and V. Gordon Rose, Legal and Criminological Psychology

For links to the documents discussed in this section, visit www.theatlantic.com/doc/200805/primarysources.

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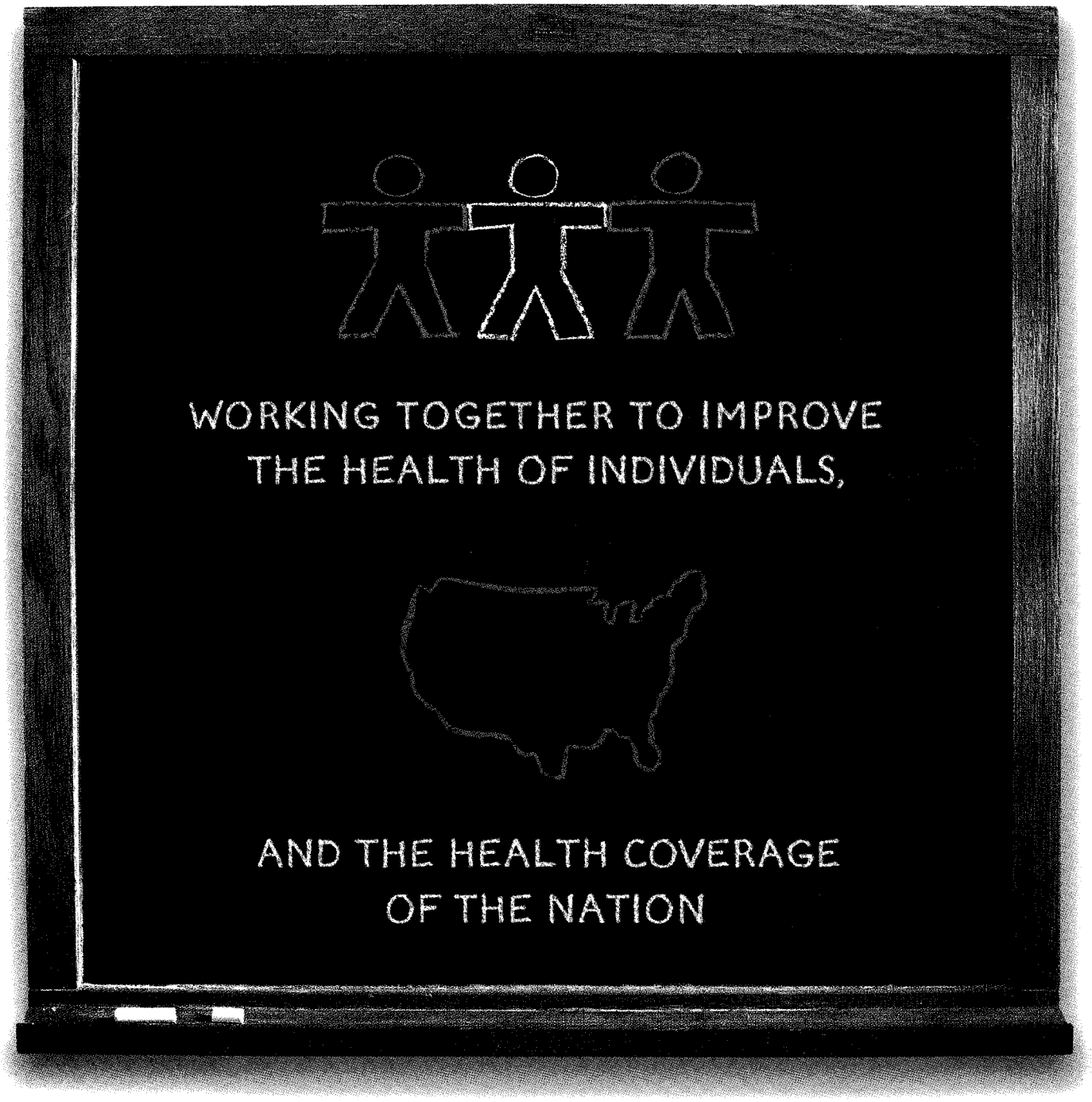

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THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

By deporting record numbers of Latino criminals, the U.S. may make its gang problem worse.

How to Grow a Gang

BY MATTHEW QUIRK

With anti-immigrant sentiment rising, mass deportation is making a comeback. During fiscal 2006 and 2007, the number of deportation proceedings jumped from 64,000 to 164,000. This fiscal year, it is expected to hit 200,000, an all-time high.

Latino gang members have been targeted for particularly aggressive action. Since 2005, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) dragnets have swept up more than 6,000 suspected gangsters. From 2005 to 2007, arrests—usually preludes to deportation—increased more than fivefold.

The United States has been down this road before; the mid-1990s saw a similar wave of criminal deportations. That one helped turn a small gang from Los Angeles, Mara Salvatrucha (better known as MS-13), into an international menace and what Customs and Border Protection now calls America's "most dangerous gang." It's not clear that this one will turn out much better.

MS-13 formed in the Rampart area of Los Angeles in 1988 or 1989. A civil war in El Salvador had displaced a fifth of that country's population, and a small number of the roughly 300,000 Salvadorans living in L.A. banded together to form the gang. But MS-13 didn't really take off until several years later, in El Salvador, after the U.S. adopted a get-tough policy on crime and immigration and began deporting first thousands, and then tens of thousands, of Central Americans each year, including many gang members.

Introduced into war-ravaged El Salvador, the gang spread quickly among demobilized soldiers and a younger generation accustomed to violence. Many deportees who had been only loosely affiliated with MS-13 in the U.S. became hard-core members after being stranded in a country they did not know, with only other gang members to rely on. As the gang proliferated and El Salvador tried to crack down on it, some deportees began finding their way back into the U.S.—in many cases bringing other, newly recruited gangsters with them. Deportation, incubation, and return: it's a cycle we've been caught in ever since.

Today, MS-13 has perhaps 6,000 to 10,000 members in the United States. It has grown moderately in recent years and now has a presence in 43 states (up from 32 in 2003 and 15 in 1996). Most members of the gang are foreign-born. Since 2005, ICE has arrested about 2,000 of them; 13 percent have been deported before.

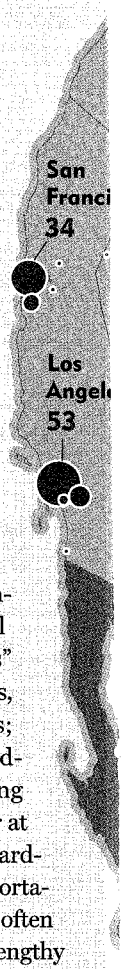
Salvadoran police report that 90 percent of deported gang members return to the U.S. After several spins through the deportation-and-return cycle, MS-13 members now control many of the "coyote" services that bring aliens up from Central America. Deportation—a free trip south—can be quite profitable for those gang members who bring others back with them upon their return.

The surge in arrests and deportations in the past three years coincides with a serious U.S. effort to improve coordination with Central American governments—the better to track gang members wherever they go. But states like El Salvador have a lot to keep track of these days. MS-13 and other gangs born in the United States now have 70,000 to 100,000 members in Central America, concentrated mostly in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The murder rate in each of these countries is now higher than that of Colombia, long the murder capital of Latin America.

Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to repeat the mistakes it made in the '90s. Most ICE arrests have been for immigration-related offenses, not criminal offenses. Suspected "associates" are lumped in with gang members, which only reinforces gang ties; with dabblers and minor offenders, experts agree that anti-gang intervention programs are better at preventing gangs' growth. For hard-core gang members, quickie deportations on immigration charges are often no more than short-term fixes; lengthy American prison sentences would be more effective.

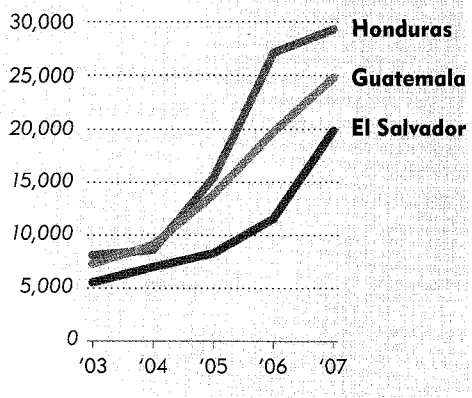
Only the U.S. has the law-enforcement personnel, the criminal-justice system, and the money to deal with the problem. Although the idea is poison in the current political climate, the way to get rid of these gangs, paradoxically, may involve keeping them here.

Matthew Quirk is an *Atlantic* staff editor.



TOTAL DEPORTATIONS

(For all reasons—not just gang-related)



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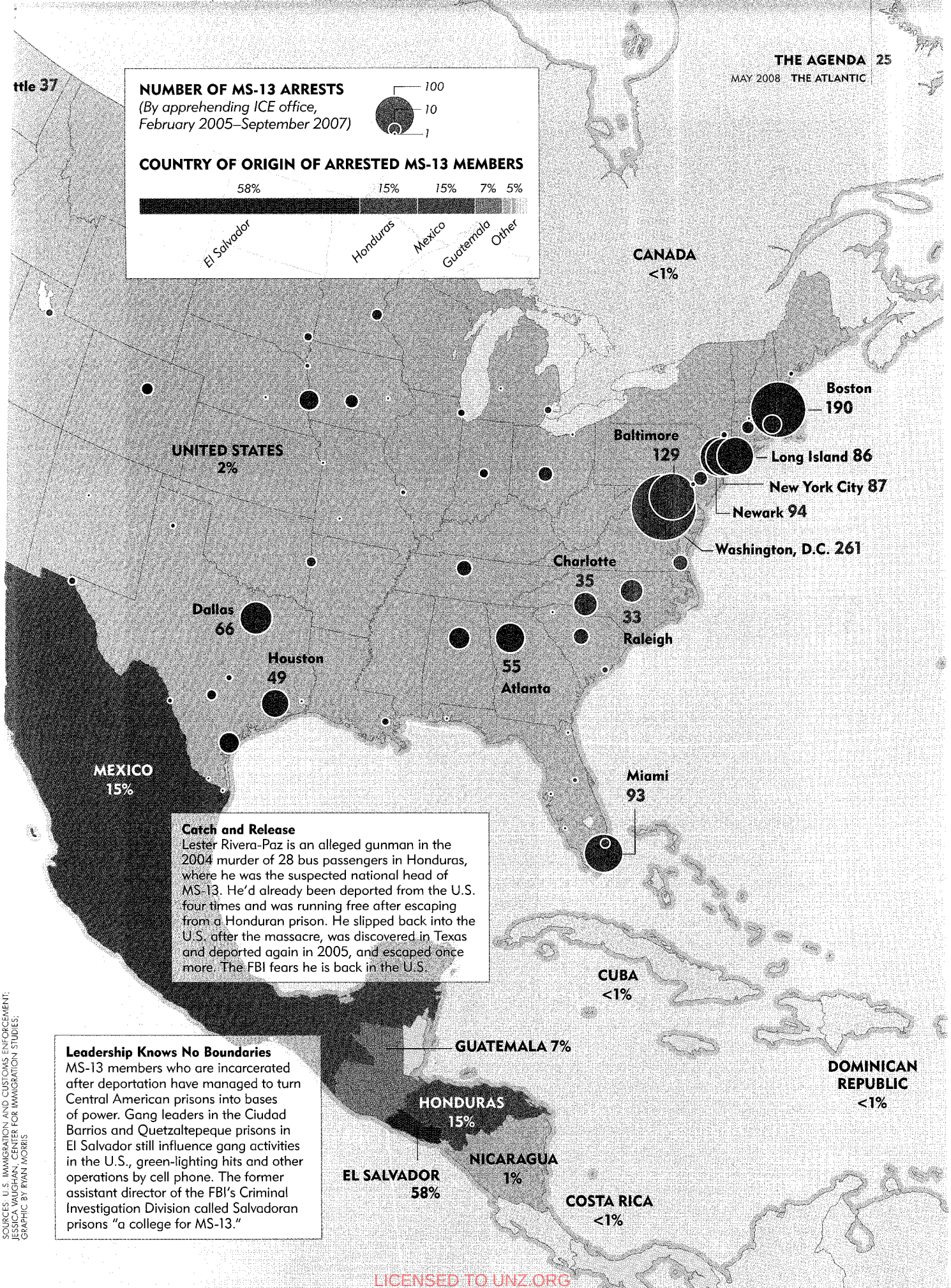

Catch and Release
Lester Rivera-Paz is an alleged gunman in the 2004 murder of 28 bus passengers in Honduras, where he was the suspected national head of MS-13. He'd already been deported from the U.S. four times and was running free after escaping from a Honduran prison. He slipped back into the U.S. after the massacre, was discovered in Texas and deported again in 2005, and escaped once more. The FBI fears he is back in the U.S.

Leadership Knows No Boundaries
MS-13 members who are incarcerated after deportation have managed to turn Central American prisons into bases of power. Gang leaders in the Ciudad Barrios and Quetzaltepeque prisons in El Salvador still influence gang activities in the U.S., green-lighting hits and other operations by cell phone. The former assistant director of the FBI's Criminal Investigation Division called Salvadoran prisons "a college for MS-13."

SOURCES: U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT; JESSICA VAUGHAN, CENTER FOR IMMIGRATION STUDIES; GRAPHIC BY RYAN MORRIS

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REPORT

A steamy solution to global warming

Waste Not

BY LISA MARGONELLI

Forty years ago, the steel mills and factories south of Chicago were known for their sooty smokestacks, plumes of steam, and throngs of workers. Clean-air laws have since gotten rid of the smoke, and labor-productivity initiatives have eliminated most of the workers. What remains is the steam, billowing up into the sky day after day, just as it did a generation ago.

The U.S. economy wastes 55 percent of the energy it consumes, and while American companies have ruthlessly wrung out other forms of inefficiency, that figure hasn't changed much in recent decades. The amount lost by electric utilities alone could power all of Japan.

A 2005 report by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory found that U.S. industry could profitably recycle enough waste energy—including steam, furnace gases, heat, and pressure—to reduce the country's fossil-fuel use (and greenhouse-gas emissions) by nearly a fifth. A 2007 study by the McKinsey Global Institute sounded largely the same note; it concluded that domestic industry could use 19 percent less energy than it does today—and make more money as a result.

Economists like to say that rational markets don't "leave $100 bills on the ground," but according to McKinsey's figures, more than $50 billion floats into the air each year, unclaimed by American businesses. What's more, the technologies required to save that money are, for the most part, not new or unproven or even particularly expensive. By and large, they've been around since the 19th century. The question is: Why aren't we using them?

One of the few people who's been making money from recycled steam is Tom Casten, the chairman of Recycled Energy Development. Casten, a former Eagle Scout and marine, has railed against the waste of energy for 30 years; he says the mere sight of steam makes him sick. When Casten walks into an industrial plant, he told me, he immediately begins to reconfigure the pipes in his head, totting up potential energy savings. Steam, of course, can be cycled through a turbine to generate electricity. Heat, which in some industrial kilns reaches 7,000°F, can be used to produce more steam. Furnace exhaust, commonly disposed of in flares, can be mixed with oxygen to create the practical equivalent of natural gas. Even differences in steam pressure between one industrial process and another can be exploited, through clever placement of turbines, to produce extra watts of electricity.

By making use of its "junk energy," an industrial plant can generate its own power and buy less from the grid. A case in point is the ArcelorMittal steel mill in East Chicago, Indiana, where a company called Primary Energy/EPCOR USA has been building on-site energy plants to capture heat and gases since 1996. Casten, Primary Energy's CEO from 2003 to 2006, was involved in several projects that now sell cheap, clean power back to the mill.

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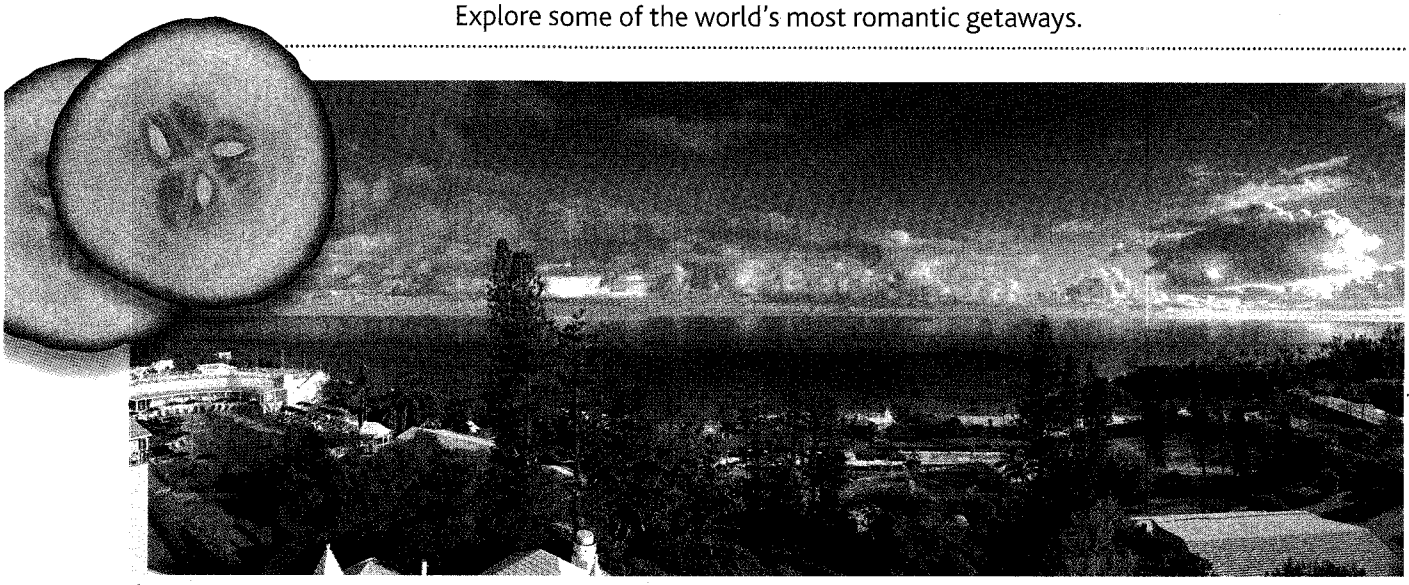
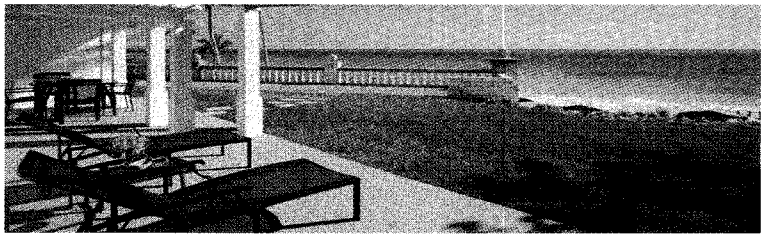


PAGET, BERMUDA

Bermuda is known for many things. It's a romantic island paradise. It's an international hub for cultural exchange. Plus, it's a great place for golf. And while you're there, visit Elbow Beach Bermuda, one of the island's finest resorts. With a world-class spa, a temperature-controlled swimming pool and an on-site shop offering snorkeling and kayaking equipment, Elbow Beach earns its title as a top do-all, be-all Bermuda resort.



LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

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KAUAI, HAWAII

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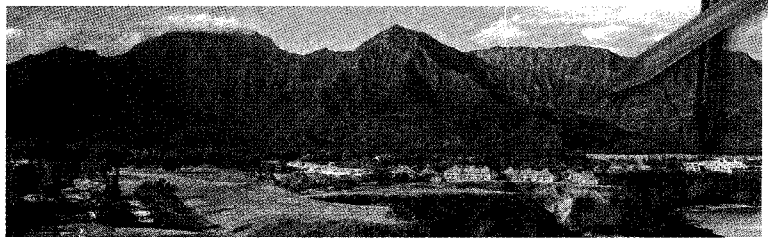

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As a result of Primary Energy's projects, the mill has cut its purchases of coal-fired power by half, reduced carbon emissions by 1.3 million tons a year, and saved more than $100 million. In March, the plant won an EPA Energy Star award. Its utilities manager, Tom Riley, says he doesn't foresee running out of profitable projects anytime soon. "You'd think you might," he says, "but you can always find more ... Energy efficiency is a big multiplier."

Casten wants to help everyone see such possibilities, so he's been combining EPA emissions figures with Google Earth images to let investors "peer" into smokestacks and visualize the wasted energy. Recycled Energy Development recently received $1.5 billion in venture funding, which should enable it to expand its reach greatly. Casten gives a whirlwind tour of the targets: natural-gas pipelines, he says, use nearly a tenth of the gas they carry to keep the fuel flowing. Capture some of the heat and pressure they lose, and the U.S. could take four coal-fired power plants offline (out of roughly 300). Another power plant could be switched off if energy were collected at the country's 27 carbon-black plants, which make particles used in the manufacture of tires. And so on through facilities that make silicon, glass, ethanol, and orange juice, until, Casten hopes, he has throngs of competitors. "I always thought that if we were successful, people would emulate us and I'd be happy at the end of the day. I just didn't think it would take 30 years."

Yet in fact, Casten still has few competitors, and the improvements he's made remain rare in American industry. With pressure growing to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, the age of recycled steam may seem closer now than it has in the past, but because of a variety of cultural, financial, and—especially—regulatory barriers, its arrival is no sure thing.

The first barrier is obvious from a trip through ArcelorMittal's four miles of interconnected pipes, wires, and buildings. Steel mills are noisy, hot, and smelly—all signs of enormous interdependent energy systems at work. In many cases, putting waste energy to use requires mixing the exhaust of one process with the intake of another, demanding coordination. But engineers have largely been trained to focus only on their own processes; many tend to resist changes that make those processes more complex. Whereas European and Japanese corporate cultures emphasize energy-saving as a strategy that enhances their competitiveness, U.S. companies generally do not. (DuPont and Dow, which have saved billions on energy costs in the past decade, are notable exceptions. ArcelorMittal's ownership is European.)

In some industries, investments in energy efficiency also suffer because of the nature of the business cycle. When demand is strong, managers tend to invest first in new capacity; but when demand is weak, they withhold investment for fear that plants will be closed. The timing just never seems to work out. McKinsey found that three-quarters of American companies will not invest in efficiency upgrades that take just two years to pay for themselves. "You have to be humbled," Matt Rogers, a director at McKinsey, told me, "that with a creative market economy, we aren't getting there," even with high oil prices.

Some of these problems may fade if energy costs remain high. But industry's inertia is reinforced by regulation. The Clean Air Act has succeeded spectacularly in reducing some forms of air pollution, but perversely, it has chilled efforts to reuse energy: because many of these efforts involve tinkering with industrial exhaust systems, they can trigger a federal or local review of the plant, opening a can of worms some plant managers would rather keep closed.

Much more problematic are the regulations surrounding utilities. Several waves of deregulation have resulted in a hodgepodge of rules without providing full competition among power generators. Though it's cheaper and cleaner to produce power at Casten's projects than to build new coal-fired capacity, many industrial plants cannot themselves use all the electricity they could produce: they can't profit from aggressive energy recycling unless they can sell the electricity to other consumers. Yet byzantine regulations make that difficult, stifling many independent energy recyclers. Some of these competitive disadvantages have been addressed in the latest energy bill, but many remain.

Ultimately, making better use of energy will require revamping our operation of the electrical grid itself, an undertaking considerably more complicated than, say, creating a carbon tax. For the better part of a century, we've gotten electricity from large, central generators, which waste nearly 70 percent of the energy they burn. They face little competition and are allowed to simply pass energy costs on to their customers. Distributing generators across the grid would reduce waste, improve reliability, and provide at least some competition.

Opening the grid to competition is one of the more important steps to take if we're serious about reducing fossil-fuel use and carbon emissions, yet no one's talking about doing that. Democratic legislators are nervous about creating incentives for cleaner, cheaper generation that may also benefit nuclear power. Neither party wants to do the dirty work of shutting down old, wasteful generators. And of course the Enron debacle looms over everything.

Technocratic changes to the grid and to industrial plants don't easily capture the imagination. Recycling industrial energy is a solution that looks, well, *gray*, not green. Steel plants, coated with rust, grime, and a century's worth of effluvia, do not make for inspiring photos. Yet Casten, pointing to the 16 heat-recycling contraptions that sit on top of the coke ovens at the East Chicago steel plant, notes that in 2004 they produced as much clean energy as all the grid-connected solar panels in the world. Green power may pay great dividends years from now. Gray power, if we would embrace it, is a realistic goal for today.

Lisa Margonelli is a fellow at the New America Foundation and the author of *Oil on the Brain: Petroleum's Long, Strange Trip to Your Tank*, just published in paperback.

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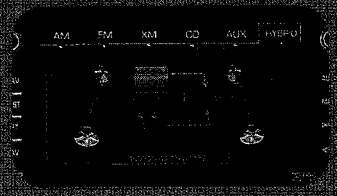

Visual readout on the navigation radio displays whatever power mode you are currently in: engine idle, engine power, hybrid power, regenerative braking, or battery power.

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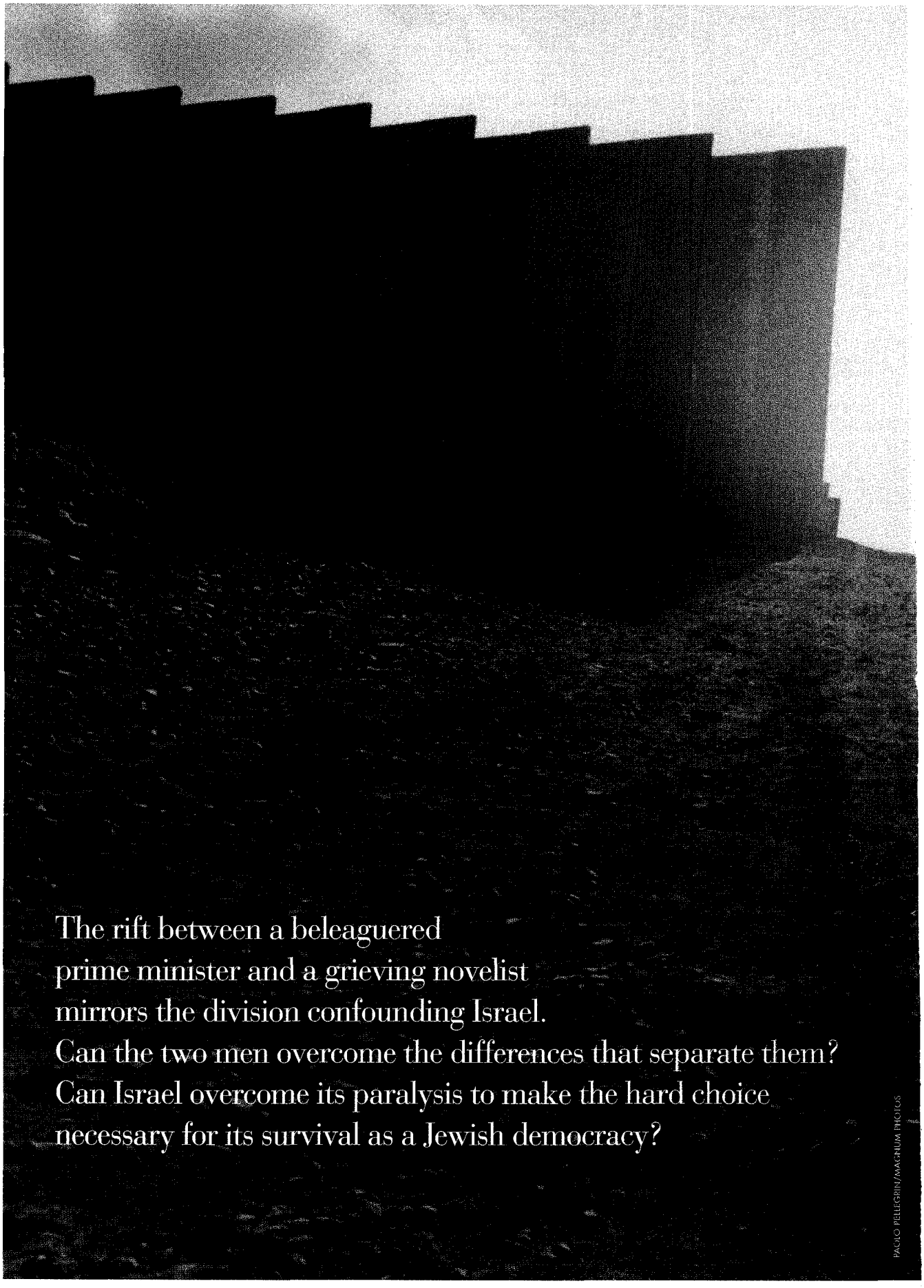

The rift between a beleaguered
prime minister and a grieving novelist
mirrors the division confounding Israel.
Can the two men overcome the differences that separate them?
Can Israel overcome its paralysis to make the hard choice
necessary for its survival as a Jewish democracy?

PAOLO PELLEGRIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

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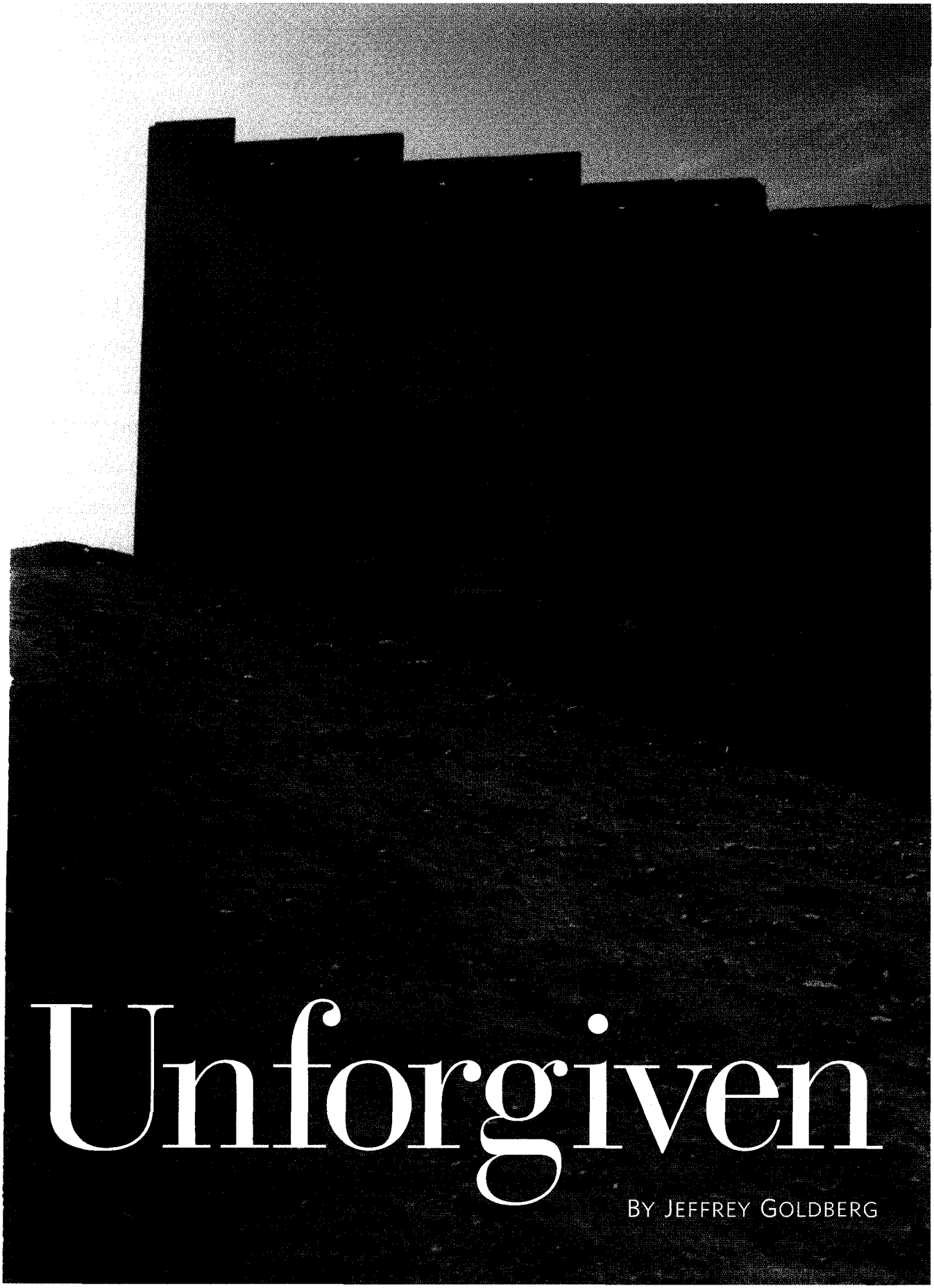

Unforgiven

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

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In early August of 2006, four weeks after the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, which has as its goal the physical elimination of Israel (and the ancillary ambition of murdering, whenever practicable, Jews elsewhere in the world), killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two more in a cross-border raid, Israel found itself in an exceedingly disagreeable position. The Hezbollah attack had prompted an immediate, and intermittently unrestrained, Israeli military response, which included thousands of bombing runs over Lebanon. The prime minister, the untried Ehud Olmert, a former mayor of Jerusalem who had taken office eight months earlier, promised to obliterate Hezbollah. In the past, Israel had destroyed far greater enemies—the Syrian air force, the Egyptian army, the Arab Legion—so it was assumed that Israel would make short work of Hezbollah, a force consisting of, at most, a few thousand fighters in possession of 12,000 short-range rockets. But within days of Israel's initial attack, it seemed obvious that the Olmert mission was in peril. The Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, which had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Hezbollah members and innocent civilians, could not stop Hezbollah's rockets from falling on northern Israel. These rocket attacks had killed dozens of Israelis—Arab Israelis included—and had made the Galilee largely uninhabitable. Thousands of Israelis became refugees in their own country, fleeing south in search of shelter.

MORE ON THEATLANTIC.COM
For an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg and a collection of writings about Palestine and Zionism from the *Atlantic* archive, visit www.theatlantic.com/palestine.

On August 9, Olmert's cabinet authorized a full-scale ground invasion. Israeli troops were already operating inside Lebanon, but in relatively modest numbers. The generals believed that an armored sweep across southern Lebanon could at least push Hezbollah's rocket teams back to the Litani River, well away from the Israeli border.

At the outset of the conflict, in July, Israelis had stood united with Olmert against Hezbollah. Israel's endless confrontation with the Palestinians is shaded with ambiguities; many Israelis wish to see a Palestinian state come into being in the West Bank and in Gaza, even as they doubt that such a state would bring an end to terrorism. With Hezbollah, there are fewer grays. Its sponsor, Iran, poses the most immediate threat to Israel's physical existence; many of its leaders are plainly anti-Semitic. Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a Holocaust denier who has called Israel a "filthy bacteria." Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has said in a speech, "If we searched the entire world for a person more cowardly, despicable, weak and feeble in psyche, mind, ideology and religion, we would not find anyone like the Jew. Notice, I do not say the Israeli."

Because the Hezbollah attack was unprovoked, much of the world had initially expressed sympathy for Israel. This took Israelis by surprise; it had been more than 40 years since they generally received such consideration from the international community. Even Sunni Arab leaders, who fear Shiite radicalism more than they dislike the Jewish state, expressed irritation with Hezbollah.

By early August, though, opinion was shifting, and the decision to launch a ground invasion just when credible cease-fire proposals were proliferating was controversial around the world, and even at home. This was at least partly because Olmert, a lawyer and party functionary, and his defense minister, a former union leader

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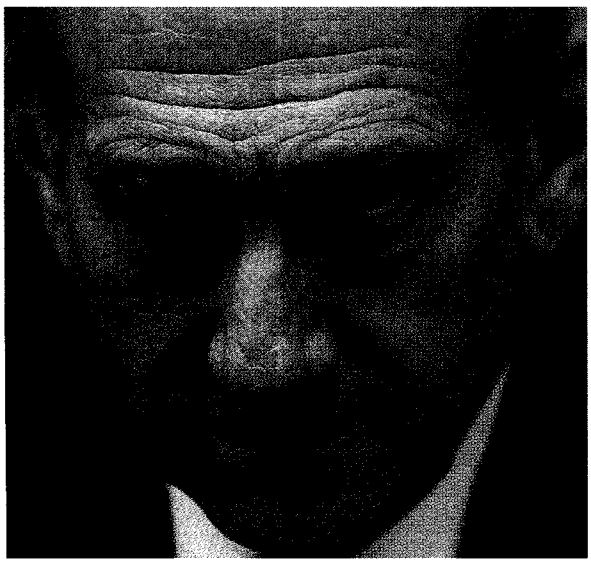
named Amir Peretz, seemed to be in over their heads. Their actions convinced some Israelis—particularly those on the left—that the decision to order a ground invasion revealed a kind of unthinking aggressiveness.

On Thursday, August 10, the day after Olmert's cabinet authorized the invasion, Israel's three most prominent writers, Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman, held a press conference to call for a cease-fire. This was not an entirely marginal exercise. Writers in Israel play a role in the moral and political life of their country that is unfamiliar to writers in the United States. The three men were not reflexively biased against Olmert, who, unlike his main political rival, the former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was something of a born-again leftist. Olmert had once been a prince of the right-wing Likud Party. But, like his mentor and predecessor, Ariel Sharon, Olmert had come to believe that a withdrawal from Palestinian territory was in the urgent best interest of Israel.



THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE NOVELIST: Ehud Olmert (left) and David Grossman

Olmert's main consideration was not moral but demographic: within the next several years, the number of Arabs under Israeli control—there are now more than 1.3 million Arab citizens of Israel (there are 5.4 million Jews), and an additional 3.4 million or more Arabs who live in the West Bank and Gaza—will be greater than the number of Jews. The Israeli demographer Sergio Della-Pergola estimates that by 2020, Jews will make up just 47 percent of the people who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Political parties of the left and the center see the "demographic threat" to Israel's Jewish majority as an existential menace nearly on a par with that posed by Iran and its nuclear program. The demographic trend has raised fears that Israel will become a state like pre-Mandela South Africa, in which the minority ruled the majority. But if the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza were given the vote, then Israel, a country whose fundamental purpose has been to serve as a refuge for persecuted Jews, and to allow those Jews to have the novel experience of being part of a majority, would disappear, to be replaced by an Arab-dominated "binational" state. Yet Israel has not found a way to escape the West Bank.

Unlike Olmert, the three writers had been longtime advocates of territorial compromise with the Palestinians, in part for reasons of morality, and in part because they want to protect their country's Jewish majority. In the days of near-hallucinatory ecstasy that followed Israel's lopsided victory in the Six-Day War of 1967—in which Israel took possession of Gaza and the West Bank—Oz was one of the first Israelis to warn about the moral and strategic consequences of military occupation, and in the late 1970s he was a founder of the left-wing group Peace Now, which advocates Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. Yehoshua, who has been called the "Israeli Faulkner" by Harold Bloom, has repeatedly urged the United States to pull its ambassador as a "symbolic" way to protect the expansion of settlements in the West Bank.

Grossman's fiction, much of it haunted by the Holocaust, concerns the durability of grief; his most accomplished novel to date, *See Under: Love* (1986), is a complicated weaving of fantasy and reality that recalls the work of Gabriel García Márquez. Grossman has been preoccupied with the ubiquity of death in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians for many years. Nearly a decade ago, he told an interviewer that Israeli couples "have three children so if one of them dies, there will be two left." Grossman made his name internationally with a book of nonfiction prophecy, *The Yellow Wind*, which he wrote (originally for an Israeli newsmagazine) in early 1987. *The Yellow Wind* was

LEFT: SEBASTIAN SCHEINER/POOL/EPA/CORBIS
RIGHT: © HANNAH/OPALE

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UNSETTLED: Israeli citizens protest the dismantling of settlements in 2005.

PAOLO PELLEGRIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

an exposé of the occupation and its demoralizing effects on Palestinians, and on the Israelis who enforced it. The book presaged the first intifada, or uprising, which began in December of that year.

Though all three authors were advocates of compromise and believed that Israel's settlement enterprise in the West Bank was a catastrophe, none was a pacifist, all were patriots, and all supported the initial retaliation against Hezbollah. "It would have been immoral not to respond," Yehoshua told me later, but after the Lebanese government promised to rein in Hezbollah, "we had to say 'Enough.'" Grossman did much of the speaking at the press conference that day. His main contention was that Israel had overreached in the pursuit of self-defense. "The argument that an Israeli presence on the Litani would prevent the firing of missiles on Israel is an illusion," he said. "Even the argument that we mustn't give Hezbollah a sense of security has been irrelevant for a long time. Hezbollah wishes to see us sink deeper into the Lebanese swamp."

Grossman saw in Olmert's invasion what he called an emblematic, and regrettable, Israeli response to terrorist threats, of a piece with Israel's typical response to dangers posed by Hamas in Gaza. "Now we must look ... not to the familiar, instinctive reaction of the Israeli way of fighting—that is, what doesn't work with force will work with much more force," he said. "Force, in this case, will fan the flames of hatred for Israel in the region and the entire world, and may even, heaven forbid, create the situation that will bring upon us the next war and push the Middle East to an all-out, regional war."

Grossman closed the press conference without mentioning his personal interest in the war: his 20-year-old son, Uri, was a tank commander then fighting in Lebanon. To do so would have been unseemly, and un-Israeli, he told me later. "The cause was to stop the war for the sake of the entire country."

Grossman is 54, but he is trim and his face is unlined. He is reflective and self-contained, somewhat owlish, but not without humor. We met on a cold day in Jerusalem, at Mishkenot Sha'ananim, an artists' colony situated across the Valley of Hinnom from Mount Zion.

Grossman told me that after the press conference, he went home to work on his latest novel, which he had begun in May of 2003, when Uri, the second of his three children, was about to be called up for army service. Grossman's oldest boy, Yonatan, had already completed three years in the army.

"I thought about writing a novel about an Israeli soldier, a tank commander, who goes to a big military operation," he said. "His mother has a kind of premonition that he's going to be killed, and she will do everything she can in order to prevent that from happening. So she escapes. She will not be at home when the army comes to announce the death of her son. She understands that bad news takes two people, one to deliver and one to receive, and she will

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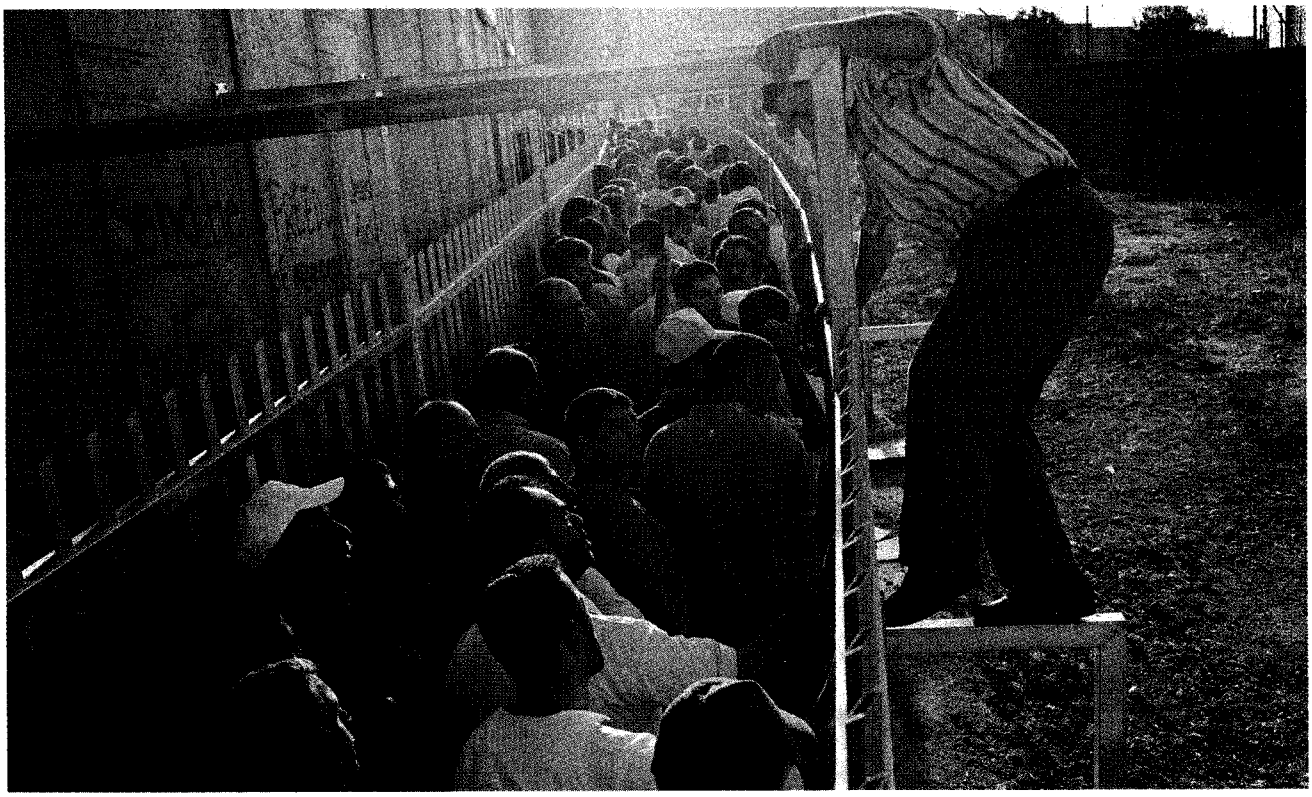

UNRESOLVED: Palestinian workers approach a checkpoint to Jerusalem in 2007.

CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON/MAGNUM PHOTOS

not be there to receive. She starts a walk across Israel, a 500-kilometer walk, and she tells the story of her son's life, from the smallest details to the largest things, to someone who is very significant to her. She believes that this will protect her son."

Grossman himself took a similar journey while writing the book, spending weeks crossing Israel on foot, and he visited with army officers whose duty it is to inform families of the deaths of their children.

At 2:40 a.m. on Sunday, August 13, three days after the press conference, Grossman's doorbell rang. There were officers at the door. Uri had been killed in action in Lebanon, in the village of Hirbat Kasif, when a Hezbollah missile struck his tank. He was one of 24 soldiers to die on the first day of the ground offensive. Five hours later, David and his wife, Michal, woke up Uri's sister, Ruti, who was then 13. As she cried, she asked, "But we will still go on living, right?"

Yehoshua, who is close to the family, told me that the Grossmans had taken to turning off their outside light at night, to make it more difficult for a messenger to find the house. But on that particular night, Michal had turned their outside light on. She later worried, she said, that in so doing she had "invited the terrible news."

Among the mourners to visit the next day were Oz and Yehoshua. "Maybe he was trying to prevent Uri's death by writing down his most terrible fears," Yehoshua told me. "It's a terrible tragedy that it didn't work."

Grossman recalled the visit of Oz and Yehoshua the day after Uri's death.

"When Uri fell, the morning after, they came to the shivah"—the period of visitation and mourning that follows a Jewish burial—"and I told them I won't be able to save this novel. I think it was Amos who said, 'The novel will save you.' The day after the shivah, I went back and started to work again." I asked Grossman whether the novel has changed. "The writer changed, not the story. I knew how the story was going to end. I don't want to say it." There is more sadness in the book now, he said, "sadness for the fate of the young man, for the future of Israel, but I must say that the small number of people who have read it say they find it comforting."

The novel is being published this spring. It could have a seismic effect on Israelis, who have, in their 60th year of independence, grown tired of losing their sons to war.

The death of Uri has made his father, a man obviously vulnerable to existential worry, preternaturally aware of the insecurity around him. The 60th anniversary of Israel's birth—it gained independence on May 15, 1948—is meant to be a celebration, but Grossman sees darkness ahead. "Our army is big, we have this atom bomb, but the inner feeling is of absolute fragility, that all the time we are at the edge of the abyss."

Israelis have violently contradictory feelings about their future. Their country is, by almost any measure,

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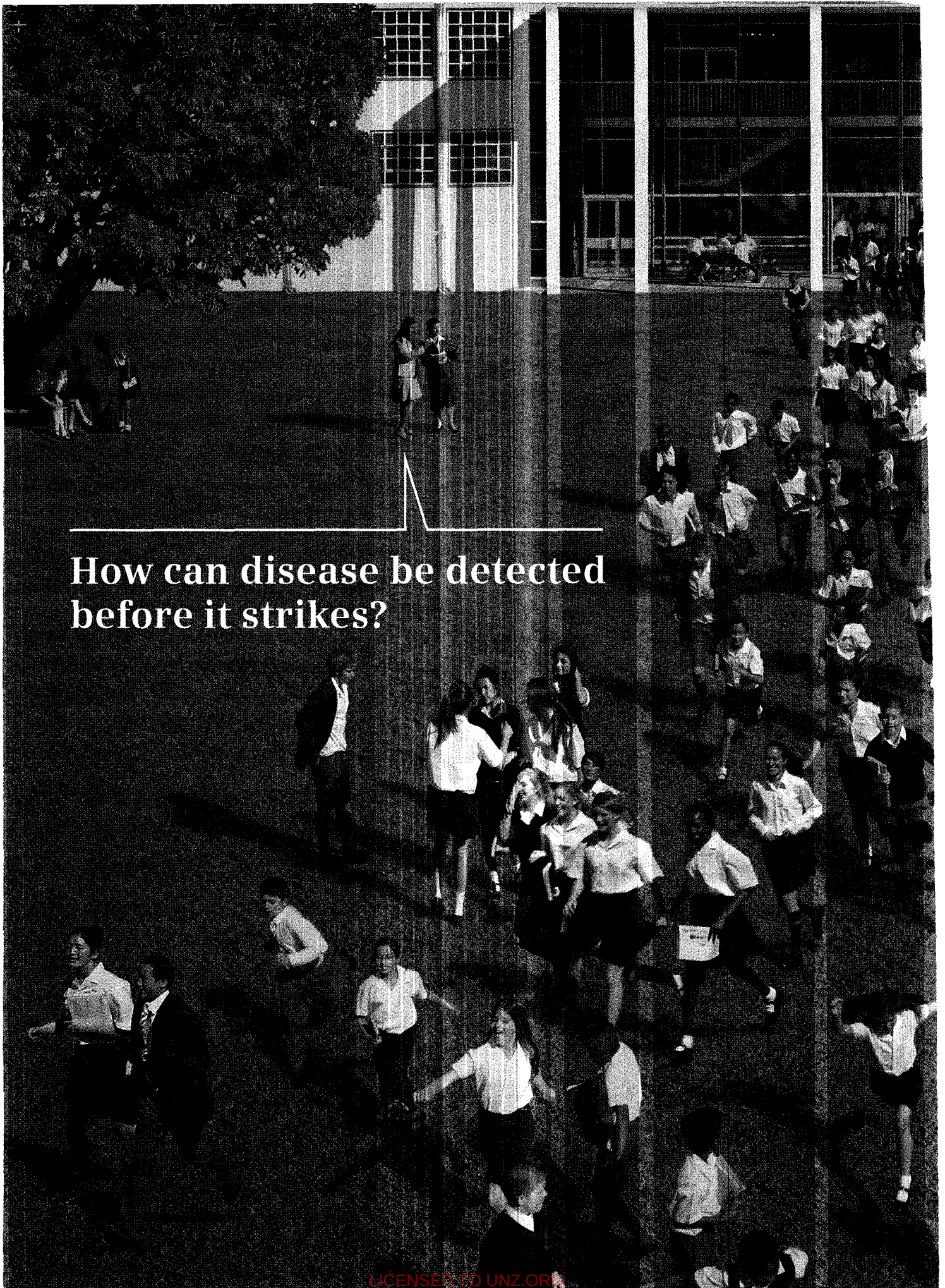

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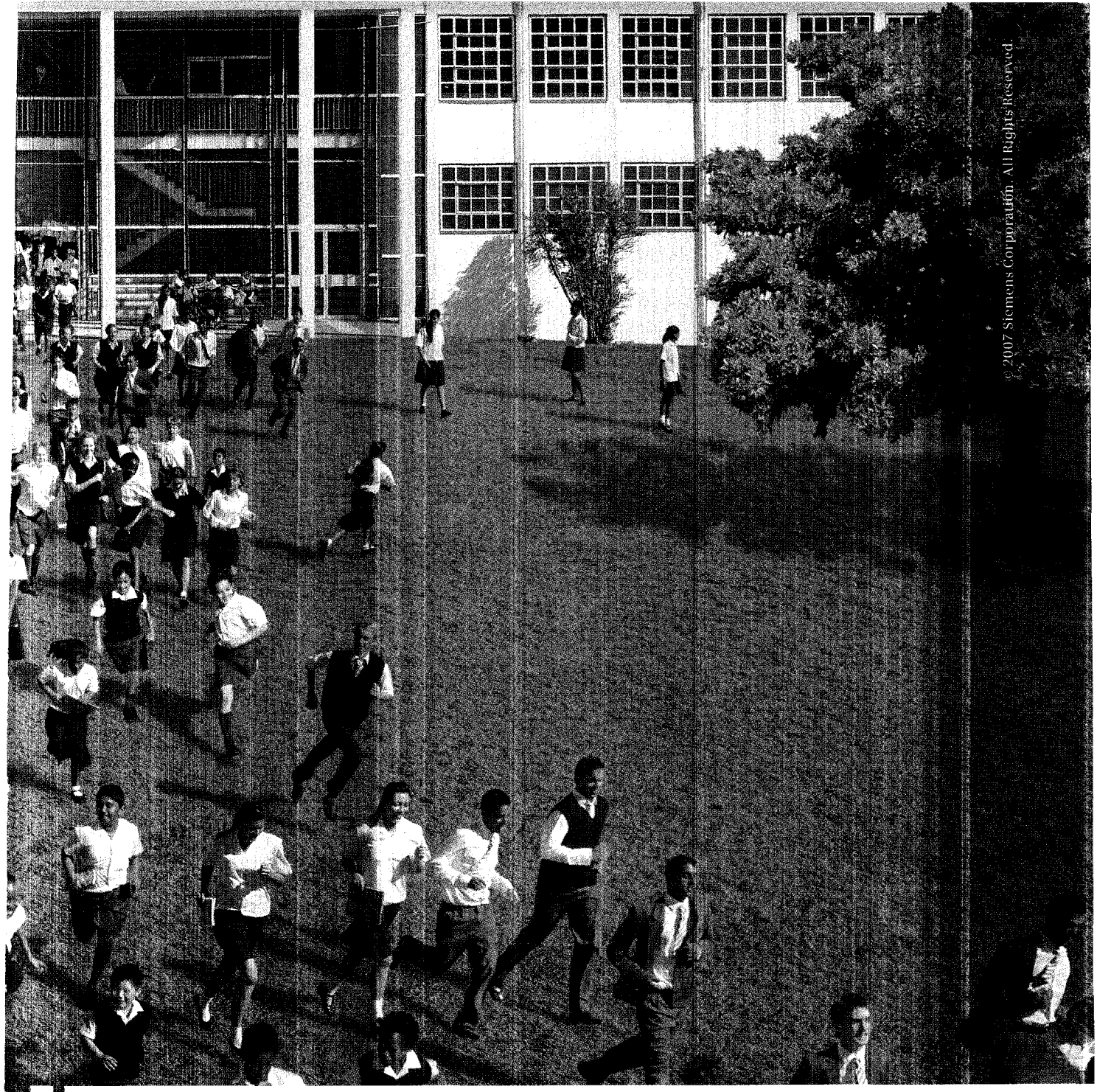

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an astonishing success. It has a large, sophisticated, and growing economy (its gross domestic product last year was $150 billion); the finest universities and medical centers in the Middle East; and a main city, Tel Aviv, that is a center of art, fashion, cuisine, and high culture spread along a beautiful Mediterranean beach. Israel has shown itself, with notable exceptions, to be adept at self-defense, and capable (albeit imperfectly) of protecting civil liberties during wartime. It has become a worldwide center of Jewish learning and self-expression; its strength has straightened the spines of Jews around the world; and, most consequentially, it has absorbed and enfranchised millions of previously impoverished and dispossessed Jews. Zionism may actually be the most successful national liberation movement of the 20th century.

Yet 60 years of independence have not provided Israel with legitimacy in its own region. Two of its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, have signed peace treaties with Israel, but it is still a small Jewish island in a great sea of Islam, a religion that seems today more allergic than ever to the idea of Jewish independence. Iran poses the most ruthless threat to Israel's existence—no other member of the United Nations has so insistently, and in such baroque terms, threatened the destruction of another member state.

The internal threats to Israel's existence are severe as well. Israel's greatest military victory, in 1967, led to a squalid and seemingly endless occupation, and to the birth of a mystical, antidemocratic, and revanchist strain of Zionism, made manifest in the settlements of the West Bank. These settlements have undermined Israel's international legitimacy and demoralized moderate Palestinians. The settlers exist far outside the Israeli political consensus, and their presence will likely help incite a third intifada. Yet the country seems unable to confront the settlements.

Israel's people are among the world's most patriotic—in a recent survey, 94 percent of Jewish Israelis said they are willing to fight for their country (by contrast, 63 percent of Americans are willing to fight for theirs), but 44 percent of Israelis said they would be ready to leave their country if they could find a better standard of living abroad. There are already up to 40,000 Israelis in Silicon Valley (and more than a half million across the U.S.), and the emigration of Israel's most talented citizens is a constant worry of Israeli leaders. "Jews know that they can land on their feet in any corner of the world," Ehud Barak, the defense minister and former prime minister, told me. "The real test for us is to make Israel such an attractive place—cutting-edge in science, education, culture, quality of life—that even American Jewish young people want to come here. If we cannot do this, even those who were born here will consciously decide to go to other places. This is a real problem."

There are other, more disturbing issues, ones that many Israelis don't care to address. Uri Grossman's death provoked in me all sorts of questions about Israel, its purpose, its mistakes and enemies: How can Israel survive the next 60 years in a part of the world that gives rise to groups like Hamas? How can Israel flourish if its army cannot defeat small bands of rocketeers? Does the concentration of so many Jews in a claustrophobically small space in the world's most volatile region actually undermine the Jewish people's ability to survive, an ability that was called into question little more than 60 years ago, when 33 percent of the world's Jews were murdered? I do not think it is merely a symptom of Jewish hypochondria to ask such questions.

Some of the questions forming in my mind were too indecent to ask a grieving father like David Grossman. But I asked him whether he believed that Zionism has succeeded in its mission. I framed the question impersonally, though I had been struck by what to me was an inescapable truth: if Uri Grossman had been born to Jews in America, rather than to Jews in Israel, in 2006 he most likely would have been a student at Harvard or Michigan or Stanford, rather than a commander in the Armored Corps of the Israel Defense Forces. The underlying premise of the creation of the state of Israel—its main mission—was to provide a refuge for the Jewish people in their historic homeland. One of the many contradictions Israel faces in its seventh decade of independence is this: it is a country that is safe for Judaism, but not for Jews.

One of the many contradictions Israel faces in its seventh decade of independence is this: it is a country that is safe for Judaism, but not for Jews.

As a young Zionist in the late 1980s, I was drawn to the idea that Israel represented the most sublime and encompassing expression of Jewishness, so I moved there and joined its army. This decision was unfathomable to many of my new Israeli comrades. One of my commanders asked me, "Why would a person leave America to die in Israel?" Then he asked if we could switch places—he would move to New York and marry a doctor's daughter, and I would die chasing Palestinians through the casbah of Nablus. I was dreaming Leon Uris dreams, but he was having visions out of *Goodbye, Columbus*.

I didn't die, obviously, but his argument bothered me, and still does. The founders of Zionism believed

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that a state for the Jews would cure—or at least make irrelevant—the ancient European disease of Jew hatred. Remove the Jew from his insalubrious and constricted life in anti-Semitic Russia and give him a plow in Palestine, and he would become a "normal" person, deserving, among other things, the respect of Christians. The first Zionists had no sense that Muslims would object to the entry of thousands of Jewish socialists—women wearing pants included—into tribal, conservative Palestine. In his utopian novel, *Altneuland*—"Old-New Land"—the founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, imagined an Israel much like Vienna, a society of opera-going, German-speaking Jews who had shed their "pale, weak, timid" natures. Herzl did not imagine a Palestine free of Arabs, though he imagined the Arabs overjoyed by the gifts of science and hygiene brought by the Jews. The principal Arab protagonist, Reschid Bey, says: "The Jews have enriched us. Why should we be angry with them? They dwell among us like brothers. Why should we not love them?"

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, was not unaware of Arab hostility to the goals of Zionism. In a 1934 meeting with the Arab leader Musa Alami, Ben-Gurion said that Zionism would "bring a blessing to the Arabs of Palestine, and they have no good cause to oppose us." Alami responded, "I would prefer that the country remain impoverished and barren for another hundred years, until we ourselves are able to develop it on our own." But Ben-Gurion believed that numbers would bring the cure. He said in 1933, "In the course of four to five years we must bring in a quarter of a million Jews and the Arab question will be solved."

Arab opposition did not die; it hardened. This opposition has, of course, gotten the Palestinians nothing; theirs is perhaps the least successful national liberation movement of the 20th century. But failure has not diminished the desire of many Muslims to see the end of Israel, and the ultimate success of the Zionist idea depends not only on Israel's ability to keep its citizens alive but on its ability to end talk of its impermanence.

"I think that this fear, this idea that Israel will not exist anymore—I cannot even utter specific, clear words because it's really frightening—this idea or fear hovers above us all the time," Grossman told me. "It is so present, even though we suppress it almost violently. Whenever it infiltrates the consciousness, it's almost paralyzing. You can see if you look at the numbers—how few we are, how many they are, how hostile this region is, how we have never been accepted into this region."

He continued: "If you see the tendencies of fanaticism, the way in which at every crossroads both sides almost always choose the more violent approach, if you see the fact that other religions, parts of the West, never really accept the idea of Israel ... It means something deep about us (and even more about everyone else), about Judaism and the state that we are still in, after 60 years of sovereignty—we have not accomplished statehood, the realization that this is a legitimate state. And we have a lack of confidence in our own existence. We also don't really believe in our own existence. We have the formal symptoms of a normal state, but we still do not believe we are a state. Throughout history we were regarded, and we regarded ourselves, as a larger-than-life story, since the time of the Bible. We're a story that other nations read and borrow. But if you are a story, you can end."

Of course, America is sui generis in its acceptance of Jews, having brought them to the absolute center of its national life. This means that their story will come to an end not because of the actions of Iran, or of the Palestinians, but because they choose to end it, by assimilating completely.

I acknowledged to Grossman that, at a time of maximum distress, the late 1930s, America refused to admit thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi terror (if Israel had been created in 1939, not 1948, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Jews could have been saved). But the Diaspora, and the American diaspora experience in particular, no longer represents a danger to physical Jewish existence. Grossman steered the conversation away from issues of mere physical security. Israel still gives a Jew the best chance of feeling at home in the world, he said.

"Maybe if you live in other places, you are integrated, you feel assimilated. I wouldn't like to live in any other place. With all the difficulty and criticism I have, it is still for me, as a Jewish person, the highest spiritual challenge and endeavor to see this country become a better place."

Uri Grossman's death became a national trauma amid the larger national trauma of the Lebanon misadventure. Grossman remained silent about the war, and about politics, from his son's death, in August, until that November, when he addressed 100,000 Israelis at a memorial service for Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister assassinated in 1995 by an extremist supporter of the settlements. Olmert was on the stage as well; Grossman refused to shake hands with the prime minister, but he directed his words at him.

"The death of young people is a horrible, shattering waste," he said. "But no less dreadful is the sense that for many years, the state of Israel has been squandering not only the lives of its children but also the miracle it experienced—the great and rare opportunity bestowed upon it by history, the opportunity to create an enlightened, decent, democratic state that would conduct itself according to Jewish and universal values. A state that would be a national home and a refuge, but not *only* a refuge; rather, a place that would also give new meaning to Jewish existence."

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He went on to criticize the country's leaders, saying that they could not "help a nation adrift in such a complicated state of affairs."

"Mr. Prime Minister, I am not saying these things out of anger or vengefulness. I have waited long enough so that I would not be responding from a fleeting impulse. You cannot dismiss my words tonight by saying that a man should not be judged at his time of grief. Of course I am in grief. But more than anger, what I feel is pain. This country pains me, and what you and your friends are doing to it. Believe me, your success is important to me, because the future of us all depends on your ability to get up and do something."

Grossman then pleaded with Olmert to speak directly to the Palestinian people. He has argued that the flaw of the Oslo peace process of the 1990s was that the negotiators never spoke about the shape of a final agreement—including the shape of the future state of Palestine.

"Go to them over the head of Hamas," Grossman said to Olmert. "Go to the moderates among them, the ones who, like me and you, oppose Hamas and its ways. Go to the Palestinian people. Speak to their deep grief and wounds, recognize their continued suffering. Your status will not be diminished, nor will that of Israel in any future negotiations. But people's hearts will begin to open a little to one another, and this opening has huge power."

Grossman told me that the self-created trap for Olmert is that he knows what needs to be done—leave the West Bank—but is powerless to do it. "*I* could give his speeches regarding peace," Grossman said. "But when will he evacuate an outpost?" he asked, referring to newly built satellite enclaves outside existing settlements. "When will he speak to the hopes and fears of the Palestinians? When will he do something to save us?"

The number of Arabs under Israeli control will soon be greater than the number of Jews, raising fears that Israel will become like pre-Mandela South Africa, with the minority ruling the majority.

"David Grossman thinks that you haven't done enough to remove outposts and leave the West Bank," I told Olmert when I visited him a few weeks ago. The prime minister leaned back in his chair. His face took on a dark cast. "Listen," he said with evident irritation. "This is why I am prime minister and he is a writer."

Olmert sighed. "I'll tell you, I don't like to argue with David since he lost his son," he said. "I think there is an emotional part in the way he expresses himself about me, which has nothing to do with my views or my actions."

Olmert is a man of medium height and build, with a high forehead and large features, who thrusts his jaw out when he speaks. He saw me in his office at the government compound in Jerusalem. The compound is an armed fortress, and the prime minister's office is separated from the outside world by several layers of unforgiving security. Since the murder of Rabin, and especially since Israel began targeting Hamas leaders for assassination, the prime minister of Israel has become one of the world's most comprehensively guarded men.

The office itself is unadorned and windowless, narrow—a submarine. On the wall next to Olmert's desk hang portraits of various prime ministers, including Ariel Sharon and Menachem Begin. Two of his recent predecessors, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, are missing. Where are they? I asked.

"I could answer," Olmert said waspishly, "but I prefer not to."

Olmert is said to be capable of projecting kindness, and he has a talent for sycophancy (his speech welcoming President Bush to Israel earlier this year was particularly overripe). But he can be a haranguing, preemptively defensive man. I recently watched Olmert address a small group of American Jewish leaders, including some who, unlike the majority of American Jews, are dubious about Olmert's embrace of moderation, and his willingness to negotiate the future of Jerusalem. "I know everyone is very sensitive and very curious about Jerusalem," he said. "Sometimes when I hear people talking to me about Jerusalem, I say, 'Hey, excuse me, what exactly did you build in Jerusalem, that you are preaching to me? Who built more in Jerusalem and did more to protect the unity of the city of Jerusalem than any of those who are wasting lots of energies and spending a lot of money in order to try and overswarm my position?'" (Olmert later told me that unnamed American Jews are "investing a lot of money trying to overthrow the government in Israel.")

In the course of our conversation, I told Olmert I thought it wasn't entirely fair to discount Grossman's criticisms as being motivated by grief. The two men have been acquaintances for many years, and it is true that Grossman has refused to speak to Olmert since Uri's death. But Grossman today is critical of Olmert's approach to matters concerning the West Bank, and he has said that he would speak to Olmert, and even stand with him, if he believed that the prime minister was truly serious about taking the necessary steps toward reconciliation with the Palestinians.

The prime minister was doubtful. "He doesn't really separate the personal from the political," Olmert said. "I

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Does science make belief in God obsolete?

Of course not.

Belief—or disbelief—in God is not a scientific opinion, a judgment about physical facts in the world. It is an element in something larger and more puzzling—our wider worldview,

the set of background assumptions by which we make sense of our world as a whole.

We seldom notice these assumptions, but we often use them in resolving our inner conflicts. As life goes on, we shape them gradually into patterns by which to relate the things we find most important. And occasionally, when something goes badly wrong, we realize that we must somehow think differently about our whole lives. Doing this is not an irrational substitute for formal proof. It is the groundwork without which new thought is impossible…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Mary Midgley is a philosopher with a special interest in ethics, human nature and science, and is the author of Evolution as a Religion *and* Science as Salvation.

Yes, if by...

"science" we mean the entire enterprise of secular reason and knowledge (including history and philosophy), not just people with test tubes and white lab coats.

Traditionally, a belief in God was attractive because it promised to explain the deepest puzzles about origins. Where did the world come from? What is the basis of life? How can the mind arise from the body? Why should anyone be moral?

Yet over the millennia, there has been an inexorable trend: the deeper we probe these questions, and the more we learn about the world in which we live, the less reason there is to believe in God.

Start with the origin of the world. Today no honest and informed person can maintain that the universe came into being a few thousand years ago and assumed its current form in six days (to say nothing of absurdities like day and night existing before the sun was

created). Nor is there a more abstract role for God to play as the ultimate first cause…

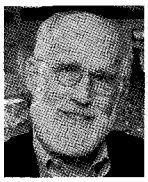
CONTINUED ONLINE.

Steven Pinker is the Johnstone Family Professor in the department of psychology at Harvard University. He is the author of seven books, including The Language Instinct, How the Mind Works, The Blank Slate, *and most recently,* The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature.

No, not at all.

As a physician and researcher, I employ science to decipher human biology and treat disease. As a person of faith, I look to my religious tradition for the touchstones of a moral life. Neither science nor faith need contradict the other; in fact, if one appreciates the essence of each, they can enrich each other in a person's life.

So, the question of obsolescence is miscast, because science and faith should exist in separate realms. Science uses logic and experimental methods to measure and describe the material world. It yields knowledge about the workings



of molecules and machines, mitosis and momentum. Science has no moral valence. It is neutral. DNA technology can craft a cure for a cancer or produce a weapon of bioterrorism. It is only a person's application of science that takes on a moral dimension…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Jerome Groopman is the Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard and author of How Doctors Think.

Yes.

Once upon a time there were a number of strong scientific arguments for the existence of God. One of the oldest and most prevalent is the argument from design. Most people look at the complexity of the world and cannot conceive of how it could have come about except by the action of a being or force of great power and intelligence.

The design argument received perhaps its most brilliant exposition in the work of the Anglican archdeacon William Paley. In his *Natural Theology or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of The Deity Collected*

from the Appearance of Nature, first published in 1802, Paley wrote about finding both a stone and a watch while crossing a heath. Though the stone would be regarded as a simple part of nature, no one would question that the watch is an artifact, designed for the purpose of telling time. Paley then proposed that objects of nature, such as the human eye, give every indication of being similar contrivances.

When Charles Darwin entered Cambridge in 1827 he was assigned to the same rooms in Christ's College occupied by William Paley seventy years earlier. By that time the syllabus included the study of Paley's works and Darwin was deeply impressed. He remarked that Paley's work "gave me as much delight as did Euclid."…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Victor J. Stenger is emeritus professor of physics and astronomy, University of Hawaii, adjunct professor of philosophy, University of Colorado, and the author of seven books including God: The Failed Hypothesis—How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist.

Not necessarily.

But you must find a science-friendly, science-compatible God. First, try the pantheon of available Creators. Inspect thoroughly. If none fits the bill, invent one.

The God of your choice must be a stickler for divine principles. Science does not take kindly to

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a deity who, if piqued or euphoric, sets aside seismological or cosmological principles and causes the moon to shiver, the earth to split asunder, or the universe to suddenly reverse its expansion. This God must, among other things, be stoically indifferent to supplications for changing local meteorological conditions, the task having already been assigned to the

discipline of fluid dynamics. Therefore, indigenous peoples, even if they dance with great energy around totem poles, shall not cause even a drop of rain to fall on parched soil…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy is chairman of the department of physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan, and is the author of Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality.

No, but it should.

Until about 1832, when it first seems to have become established as a noun and a concept, the term "scientist" had no really independent meaning. "Science" meant "knowledge" in much the same way as "physic" meant medicine, and those who conducted experiments or organized field expeditions or managed laboratories were known as "natural philosophers." To these gentlemen (for they were mainly gentlemen) the belief in a divine presence or inspiration was often merely

assumed to be a part of the natural order, in rather the same way as it was assumed—or actually insisted upon—that a teacher at Cambridge University swear an oath to be an ordained Christian minister. For Sir Isaac Newton—an enthusiastic alchemist, a despiser of the doctrine of the Trinity and a fanatical anti-Papist—the main clues to the cosmos were to be found in Scripture. Joseph Priestley, discoverer of oxygen, was a devout Unitarian as well as a believer in the phlogiston theory. Alfred Russel Wallace, to whom we owe much of what we know about evolution and natural selection, delighted in nothing more than a session of ectoplasmic or spiritual communion with the departed.

And thus it could be argued—though if I were a believer in god I would not myself attempt to argue it—that a commitment to science by no means contradicts a belief in the supernatural. The best known statement of this opinion in our own time comes from the late Stephen Jay Gould, who tactfully proposed that the worlds of science and religion commanded "non-overlapping *magisteria*." How true is this on a second look, or even on a first glance?…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Christopher Hitchens is the author of God Is Not Great *and the editor of* The Portable Atheist.

Absolutely not!

Now that we have scientific explanations for the natural phenomena that mystified our ancestors, many scientists and non-scientists believe that we no longer need to appeal to a supernatural God for explanations of anything, thereby making God obsolete. As for people of faith, many of them believe that science, by offering such explanations, opposes their understanding that the universe is the loving and purposeful creation of God. Because science denies this fundamental belief, they conclude that

science is mistaken. These very different points of view share a common conviction: that science and religion are irreconcilable enemies. They are not…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

William D. Phillips, a Nobel Laureate in physics, is a fellow of the Joint Quantum Institute of the University of Maryland and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

It depends.

The answer turns on whether one emphasizes *belief* or *God*. Science does not make belief in God obsolete, but it may make obsolete the reality of God, depending on how far we are able to push the science.

On the question of belief in God, the answer is clearly *no*. Surveys conducted in 1916 and again in 1997 found that 40 percent of American scientists said they believe in God, so obviously the practice of science does not make belief in God obsolete for this sizable group.

Neither does it for the hundreds of millions of practicing Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and members of other faiths who both believe in God and fully embrace science. Even on one of the most contentious issues in all of science—evolution—a 2005 Pew Research Center poll found that 68 percent of Protestants and 69 percent of Catholics accept the theory.

Of course, reality does not bend to the psychology of belief. Millions of people believe in astrology, ghosts, angels, ESP, and all manner of paranormal phenomena, but that does not make them real. Mormons believe that their sacred text was dictated in an ancient language onto gold plates by the angel Moroni, buried and subsequently dug up near Palmyra, New York by Joseph Smith, who then translated them by burying his face in a hat containing magic stones…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Michael Shermer is the publisher of Skeptic *magazine (www.skeptic.com), a monthly columnist for* Scientific American *(www.michaelshermer.com), a professor at Claremont Graduate University, and the author of* How We Believe, Why Darwin Matters, *and* The Mind of the Market.

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have a lot of respect for David, but I think he's wrong. First of all, he's wrong; second, I don't like to argue with him." Of the three writers who aligned against him over Lebanon, he said, "Amos Oz is the most realistic."

When I told Oz that Olmert wouldn't address Grossman's critique, he said: "I don't think David Grossman is blinded by grief. Grief can be an eye-opener. He's a perfectly legitimate critic of the Olmert government." Oz also rejected Olmert's effort to draft him to his team. "I support the peace process that began at Annapolis," he said. "I don't necessarily support Olmert on what he's doing in Gaza," referring to recent Israeli military incursions.

Olmert is more unpopular in Israel than George W. Bush is in the United States. His business dealings have repeatedly drawn the attention of the country's police and attorney general, and his reputation is that of an inauthentic, calculating man whose skills lie mainly in the area of self-advancement. The commission of inquiry appointed to investigate Israeli mistakes in Lebanon was caustic in its criticism of his leadership, finding that Olmert acted hastily and with arrogance in the rush to war. The report was even more critical of army and defense ministry leaders. It characterized the Lebanon invasion as heedless and jerry-rigged. The commission's findings were a reminder that, as the former Prime Minister Ehud Barak once told me, Jews excel at many things but not necessarily at self-rule. "The last two experiments of Jews running a political state were not great successes," he said, referring to the Israel of King Solomon's time, which ultimately ended in the exile to Babylon, and to the Jewish commonwealth of the Second Temple period, which was conquered by the Romans, who scattered the Jews.

The purpose of my visit to Olmert's office was not to plumb his resentment-filled relationship with David Grossman but to discuss the meaning of Israel's existence. When I brought up the subject of existential threats, he recoiled. "When the leader of a nation of 75 million people with ballistic missiles, with modern weapons, with a declared desire to possess a nuclear capacity, threatens Israel with annihilation, can I ignore it? Can I say I didn't hear it? Of course I can't."

Olmert was more comfortable speaking about the Zionist idea and praising Herzl's prophetic powers: few men understood at the start of the last century, as Herzl did, that Europe would soon turn against its Jews so absolutely. And he spoke of the achievements of Jewish independence—the ingathering of Jews, most especially—all of which were unassailably remarkable.

Then I asked him to discuss the flaws in the execution of the Zionist program. He responded indignantly: "I don't care about it. Of course, I mean, I care about the flaws, I'm the prime minister. I have to improve things, I have to amend things. But when I celebrate the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel, what I have in mind are the enormous achievements." He went on to discuss the largely successful absorption of 1 million Russian immigrants. "Of course there are flaws," he said. "Who cares?"

With Uri Grossman in mind, I asked Olmert about a flaw of personal concern to me: Why is Israel less physically safe for Jews than America?

He answered: "I'll tell you something that you have to realize, and this is the most important thing and this is the most significant thing. First of all, no people are safe anywhere, okay? Let me tell you, Jews are not safer in Israel than they are in other parts of the world, but there is only one place that Jews can fight for their lives as Jews, and that is here. They can fight as Americans, they can fight as Australians—but as individuals." He banged on his desk. "Jews were persecuted, Jews were attacked, Jews were suppressed, Jews were killed. But they could never defend themselves as Jews."

So the success of the American Jewish community doesn't lessen the necessity for the state of Israel? "Never, never, no way," he said. "By the way, Jews in Germany—and I don't draw any comparison at all—Jews in other parts of the world were very successful all their lives, and that didn't provide them with safety."

The prime minister of Israel should be able to muster an argument for the necessity of his country without forecasting a Holocaust in America. His was a careless and cynical statement, one that supports the notion that he is not Israel's deepest thinker. And yet his record presents an obvious contradiction. On one crucial issue, Olmert is credited by many of the most doubting Israelis with sincerity and thoughtfulness: his newfound belief that the dream of a Greater Israel—one that incorporates the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights—is dead, replaced with the recognition that the land must be split between a Jewish democratic state and an Arab state. This sort of transformation is as rare in Israeli politics as it is in American politics. "His willingness to express his new convictions and to speak about them explicitly is both bold and calculated," one of his foremost critics, the *Ha'aretz* political columnist Ari Shavit, told me.

Olmert is not the only one to undergo this transformation; an entire generation of Likud politicians, protected by the shade cast by the great fighter and Likud apostate Ariel Sharon, has embraced the argument that the occupation threatens Israel's Jewish future.

I asked Olmert whether there was a moral dimension to his desire to exit the West Bank, and I made reference to a song of his childhood, written by Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism. The revisionists are the ideological ancestors of the Likud Party. The song refers to the *shtay gadot*, or two banks, of the Jordan River: "The Jordan has two banks, and both are ours."

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"I would have loved to have *shtay gadot*!" Olmert said. It was not, as I first thought, an unconsidered outburst. He won't call the dream of both banks immoral or destructively utopian, because it is a dream that many Israelis believe is just. "If there had been a 10 percent or 15 percent minority which is not Jewish there, then it would have been legitimate. But you don't come to a majority and say to them, 'Listen, we deprive you of your right to self-determination and at the same time we won't provide you with the natural right of equality and equal votes.'"

"At the end of the day, it was about demography," he said. "We couldn't do it."

The new leftists—or new realists—find justification for their position in the earliest history of Zionism. "Go back to the Basle program of 1897, the first Zionist Congress," Israel's ambassador in Washington, Sallai Meridor, told me. Meridor and his brother Dan, who was a minister in the government of Menachem Begin, abandoned their belief in untrammeled settlement several years ago. "Herzl asks Nordau"—Max Nordau, the essayist and critic who served as his deputy—"to come up with one sentence of what Zionism is to achieve. He wrote that Zionism is meant to create for the Jewish people a homeland in the land of Israel, assured by international legitimacy. One sentence, the whole story. It's about Jewish people, about defining the community of Jews as a nation, one in the family of nations. Second, it's not a state for all citizens, but for the Jewish people. Third, it's in the land of Israel, but not necessarily *all* the land of Israel. And it has to be secured by international legitimacy."

Israel's flagging international legitimacy is one of Olmert's preoccupations. In an interview with *Ha'aretz* in November, he said, "If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses and we face a South African–style struggle for equal voting rights [among Palestinians of the occupied territories], then, as soon as that happens, the state of Israel is finished." He went on to say, "The Jewish organizations, which were our power base in America, will be the first to come out against us, because they will say they cannot support a state that does not support democracy and equal voting rights for all its residents."

As a young Knesset member of the Likud Party, Olmert was not nearly so concerned about Israel's international reputation. He voted against the ratification of the Camp David Accords with Egypt, which had been negotiated by the leader of his party, Menachem Begin. Today, he says Begin was right. "He was smarter than I was." If he were alive today, Olmert said, Begin would support an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. "Menachem Begin understood by 1977 that we couldn't incorporate Judea and Samaria [the biblical names for the West Bank] into the state of Israel. We can't do it, and therefore he did not do it."

What Olmert failed to mention was that Begin himself accelerated the process of settling Israelis in the West Bank, and was in particular a zealous supporter of Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful), the near-messianic group that seeded the West Bank with Jewish settlements. Today, the settlers are a small but influential political constituency (there are 200,000 settlers in the West Bank—a majority of whom moved there for economic, rather than ideological, reasons—and another 200,000 in the eastern suburbs of Jerusalem), and they have deployed an effective argument against expulsion: Ariel Sharon's forced removal of 8,000 settlers from the Gaza Strip three years ago, undertaken unilaterally, resulted not in peace but in a barrage of rocket attacks by Hamas on southern Israel, followed by a continuing Israeli military response.

"I'm not saying 'I told you so,' but I told you so," the settler leader Pinchas Wallerstein said not long ago when I saw him at Migron, a settlement outpost near Ramallah. Migron is "illegal," built without the approval of the government, but even the illegal outposts—there are more than 100—are in no danger of imminent evacuation. Olmert removed one, called Amona, in February 2006; more than 200 people, including two Knesset members, were hurt in the riot that accompanied the demolition, and Olmert appears wary of a repeat performance.

Like Begin, Olmert once was a friend of the settlers. I asked him why the country only recently awoke to the threat the settlements pose. He bristled. "First of all, this is something that must be understood with humility and compassion," he said. "In 1948, we achieved independence with a divided Jerusalem, with the parts of Jerusalem that were the essential ingredients of the collective Jewish memory and something that we yearned for, for thousands of years, not in our hands. In 1967 came the fulfillment, finally, of all the dreams of thousands of years by reaching the territories which are more intimately linked to Jewish history than anything else, particularly Jerusalem. So how can you wonder why we didn't have the emotional power to restrain ourselves from wanting to realize the fulfillment of our dreams? It took us time to grasp the full complexity of the situation. But how can you wonder, at the beginning, why we had this enthusiasm?"

I noted that by late 1967, David Ben-Gurion, then an old man in retirement on his desert kibbutz, was arguing that Israel should find a way out of the occupied territories as soon as possible. Did Ben-Gurion lack Zionist fervor?

Olmert litigated the question instead of answering it: "He certainly didn't say 'Get rid of Jerusalem.'"

What led to Olmert's conversion regarding the settlements was not only the realization—one that came to him over the course of three decades or so—that the permanent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza might undermine Israel's security, but also a recognition that the Palestinians themselves had changed.

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"Listen, let's face it, I don't know what my position would have been had a change not taken place on the other side as well. What the Palestinians say—not all of them, of course—some of the declared, elected leadership of the Palestinian people say, 'I want to live in peace with Israel and I recognize Israel's right to exist.' They didn't say it 40 years ago, they didn't say it 30 years ago, 25 years ago."

The Palestinians, however, are fighting a civil war. Gaza is under the control of Hamas, which is the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. The West Bank is under the control of the Palestinian Authority, headed by the Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas, who, over the past several months, has been negotiating a framework agreement for peace with Israel. All sides recognize that the Palestinian Authority would find it difficult to implement an agreement, but Olmert's goal is to negotiate the parameters of a final settlement as a way, if nothing else, to strengthen the hands of Palestinian moderates against Hamas.

The latest iteration of the never-ending Middle East peace process, launched in Annapolis late last year by President Bush, is in many ways a farce. Olmert's ruling coalition is unstable, and he is deeply unpopular. Bush shows no sustained interest in understanding the dispute. Condoleezza Rice is ignored across the Middle East. And Abbas's authority doesn't radiate far beyond Ramallah, the de facto Palestinian capital. The tragedy of this farce is that this could be the last time a two-state solution is seen as a viable option. It is a cliché for Middle East leaders to warn that time is running out, but today it seems that the possibility of a two-state solution is swiftly fading. Palestinian rejectionists and unbending Jewish settlement leaders are in harmony on this point. "It does not matter what the Jews do. We will not let them have peace," Ibrahim Mudeiris, the imam of the Ijlin Mosque in Gaza, told me not long ago. We spoke after Friday prayers. The street outside the mosque was crowded with angry young men who had been excited by Mudeiris's sermon, in which he identified Jews as "the sons of apes and pigs."

"They can be nice to us or they can kill us, it doesn't matter," he said. "If we have a cease-fire with the Jews, it is only so that we can prepare ourselves for the final battle."

For Palestinian radicals, the closing of the settlements would be a terrible blow. The smartest Palestinian strategists understand this. "The longer they stay out there, the more Israel will appear to the world to be essentially an apartheid state," the former Palestinian Authority negotiator Michael Tarazi told me a few years ago. "The settlements mean that the egg is hopelessly scrambled. Basically, it is already one state."

The hard-core settlers are as intransigent, and as patient, as their Palestinian counterparts. The mayor of Ariel, one of the West Bank's largest Jewish towns, told me that time is on the side of the settlers. Ariel, which has a population of roughly 20,000, is southwest of Nablus, the largest Arab city in the West Bank. "We have to hold on for a few more years, at most," Ron Nachman, the mayor, said. "Then the world will realize that the solution lies with Jordan." Nachman, along with many other West Bank settler leaders, believes that the Palestinians of the West Bank should be made Jordanian citizens. The Palestinians don't generally seek this. Nor do the Jordanians. But Nachman said that once the world realizes that Israel's presence in the West Bank is eternal, it will come to view the "Jordanian option" as a plausible solution. "Trust me, no one is throwing us out of Ariel," he said.

For many of the settlers, and certainly for their spiritual leaders, the state of Israel's democracy is of minimal concern. A couple of years ago, I visited the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which has graduated many of the settlement movement's leaders, to speak to its rabbis about the balance between democracy and Judaism.

In early March, the yeshiva was attacked by a Palestinian gunman who killed eight students, mainly teenagers, in a library. When I had visited Mercaz HaRav, Rabbi David Samson, a teacher at the yeshiva and one of the leading proponents of its philosophy, had foretold the attack: "We are of course a target of terror. The enemies of the Jewish people know the importance of this yeshiva. We send forth the pioneers to build the state." In the course of a lengthy discussion, Samson explained the yeshiva's position on democracy. "Democracy is not a value for us. Justice is a value, and fairness, but not democracy. In the Book of Exodus, it says that the Jews shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It does not talk about democracy." The Arabs who live in biblical Israel, he said, can either choose "to get along with us, to live peacefully, or to leave." He said the Arabs would have the status of "protected foreigners" in Israel; they would have local autonomy, but have no say in the governance of Israel.

What if the world rejects this? "The world has always rejected the Jews. But God always provides." God will punish the Jews, he said, if they divide the Holy Land. "A Palestinian state would be an abomination."

'This fear that Israel will not exist anymore hovers above us all the time. Look at the numbers—how few we are, how many they are, how hostile this region is, how we have never been accepted.'

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A Palestinian state, of course, might not come to pass. Ziad Abu Zayyad, a former minister in the Palestinian Authority government, is a veteran peace negotiator and one of the few Palestinian leaders who still view a two-state solution as conceivable. "There are only two or three years left," he said. "If this doesn't work, then everyone will be arguing for a one-state solution."

The one-state solution—the dissolution of Israel and the merging of the Jewish and Arab populations—is neither practicable nor, from the Israeli perspective, desirable. (In the 1940s, many Jewish thinkers endorsed the idea of binationalism, but the idea was rejected by the Arabs.) In any case, the dismantling of Israel as a Jewish state would, of course, demand the agreement of Israel's Jews, who, for manifold reasons, would not want to live in a state dominated by Arabs. "I'll make a prediction that Israel will not commit suicide," Yehezkel Dror, the head of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute and a political scientist at Hebrew University, told me.

David Grossman, like most of Israel's leftists, sees binationalism as simultaneously utopian and dismissive of Jewish feelings. "You know, binationalism doesn't work in so many places in the world," he said. "You see it in Belgium now. And they expect, with this really hateful combination of Jews and Arabs, that it will succeed here? It's so wrong. Part of the cure for the historical distortions of both peoples is that they need a place of their own with defined borders. We have to heal separately. I'm a little suspicious of these people who would experiment on us with binationalism."

Reality, he said, has made a Jewish state necessary. "Since the world has failed to defend Jewish existence, there is a need for a place for the Jews to implement their culture and their values and their language and their history, a place in which to recover."

But what if Israel's neighbors never give its Jews a chance to recover from history?

Since the collapse of the Oslo peace process, eight years ago, many of Grossman's allies on the left have abandoned the idea that Arabs will reconcile themselves to a Jewish state in their midst. Benny Morris, a historian who has done much work to uncover evidence of Jewish sin, as well as Arab sin, in the birth of Israel, recently wrote: "The situation [Jewish] Israelis live in, and even more so, most likely face, is antediluvian, revolutionary and possibly apocalyptic." When I spoke to Morris in Jerusalem, he described Israel as an "amazing success story" and, in virtually the same sentence, called it "the most dangerous place in the world for Jews as Jews, as a collective of 5 million people who are in danger of extinction in the short term from an Iranian nuclear bomb and in the long term by being overwhelmed by Arabs."

Grossman, despite his existential fears, has not given up on the idea of compromise. In *The Yellow Wind*, he tells of the time he found himself trapped at Bethlehem University, as a Palestinian demonstration raged around him.

> I write the following in my green notebook: Now, the truth. Are you afraid? Yes. And if something happens to you here, if they hurt you, do you think it will cause you to revise your opinions? To begin to surrender to hate? And if they were to hurt your child?
>
> I set down the answer for the record and as personal testimony, and it is all written there, in the green notebook.

His private answer is now public; since Uri's death, he has not cast aside his opposition to occupation and settlement, or his belief in reconciliation.

But this does not necessarily suggest that he would make a sophisticated negotiator, or a sound strategist. Grossman believes that Israel must negotiate with Hamas, an organization that pays obeisance to Iran, that bases its charter in part on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and

THE MOSS GARDEN

Somewhere outside Kyoto's line, she said,
they stumbled across the famous garden of moss,
the smallish sign so plain it could have been
overlooked. No temple, only moss.
So they entered the walkway with little expectation,
the silence creeping in, much like expectation.

Instead of leading them to the garden directly,
two monks had led them to a different task,
requested they copy three hundred characters,
the ink and paper set down for the task.
And this, too, was a practiced form of prayer,
left behind for those who had forgotten prayer.

The monks left brushes, ink, and bowls of water.
They asked the seekers to write, to pray. But prayer,
any prayer, wasn't easy. The brush and ink,
the doubting hand, made not for simple prayer.
And even as I write this, I do not want to pray.
This story changes nothing; I do not want to pray.

—C. DALE YOUNG

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that has shown itself to be more interested in destroying Israel than in building a state of its own.

Of course, any such talks would necessarily grant legitimacy to Hamas and undermine the more moderate Palestinian leadership in the West Bank who remain Israel's best, and perhaps only, hope for a more tranquil future.

The West Bank leadership cannot be buttressed merely with rhetoric, or with ineffectual negotiations meant to erect only the scaffolding of an agreement. The Camp David negotiations in 2000 collapsed mainly because the Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat, was unable to strike a final deal with Israel. But during the seven years of the Oslo peace process, which was meant to negotiate a Palestinian state into existence, the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank nearly doubled. It is difficult to blame Palestinians for their cynicism about Israeli intentions regarding the West Bank. Only by closing outposts and dismantling settlements can Israeli leaders help the Palestinian moderates, and themselves. When I asked Olmert why he argues for an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory but allows the expansion of existing settlements and the continued existence of illegal outposts, he barked, "I dismantled Amona!" Amona is the outpost that came down in February 2006. "That was the most traumatic event, even more than the disengagement from Gaza. It was very violent."

Not one outpost has been dismantled since Amona was closed, and none seems slated for impending disappearance. This is the core of Grossman's criticism of Olmert. The prime minister, in his view, is a skilled rhetorician but a political coward, one who speaks the language of reconciliation but whose actions in Lebanon, and in Gaza, suggest something else.

There is a split on the left; some of Grossman's allies believe that he is, in fact, too hard on the prime minister. "Olmert is paralyzed because the people are paralyzed," A. B. Yehoshua said. "The whole country is paralyzed."

And tired. Benny Morris noted recently that, just as the West is tired of the hundred-year war in the Middle East, so too are Israelis. Morris's analysis contained an echo of a statement made by Olmert three years ago, when he was still vice premier under Sharon. "We are tired of fighting," he told the Israel Policy Forum, a liberal pro-Israel group, in New York. "We are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies. We want that we will be able to live in an entirely different environment of relations with our enemies."

Olmert's shift to the left did not occur in a vacuum. His wife, Aliza, has been a sympathizer of Peace Now, and his children have been left-wing activists. One daughter, Dana, is a prominent gay-rights advocate in Tel Aviv, and has associated herself with groups opposed to her father's policies. During the 2006 Israeli incursions into Gaza, she took part in a demonstration that denounced the army chief of staff as a "child-killer." One of Olmert's sons has refused to serve his army-reserve duty in the occupied territories, and another son managed to avoid the draft altogether. Olmert's family is not entirely unusual; the secular left, which once provided a disproportionate number of officers and commandos to the army, no longer does so; sons of the settlements now account for more than 25 percent of the Israeli officer corps. Which makes the left-wing Grossman family's contribution to the national defense more striking.

I asked Olmert whether he would still like to reconcile with Grossman. "Look, I have responsibilities to attend to," he said. "I met with every one of the bereaved families who was ready to meet with me. He was demonstrating against me rather than sitting with me. Which is perfectly legitimate, but I sit with many of the families. I think most of them came here and sat with me, something you don't find in any other country in the world. If you would know how many hours I spent with the families of the fallen soldiers!"

Olmert blustered on for a while, comparing himself to Rudy Giuliani, stressing his commitment to peace and security, mocking his former Likud colleagues, and praising himself for the care he provides the families of the dead. He neglected to mention something I learned only later. For almost two years, he has repeatedly sent emissaries to Grossman, hoping for a reconciliation. These emissaries included his daughter Dana and a former speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, both sent to persuade Grossman to see him. Dana Olmert's visit backfired; Grossman asked her to place herself in his shoes: Would she reconcile with her father, if she were Grossman? No, she said, according to people familiar with the conversation.

Burg's message was unequivocal. Olmert is trying to save Israel by compromising with the Palestinians, and he is in dire need of help. The prime minister has permanently alienated the country's right wing. The Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva announced shortly after the fatal attack that Olmert would not be welcome to pay a condolence call. "We cannot receive a prime minister who advocates against the spirit of the Torah and accept that Israel withdraws from a part of the Land of Israel," a yeshiva official, Rabbi Haim Steiner, said.

Burg told me: "I believe that any person who wants to influence society cannot allow himself to be in a situation where you won't talk to the prime minister." But Grossman has so far rejected Burg's pleas.

Burg's visit was motivated not only by politics, he said. He is concerned about Olmert's emotional well-being.

"The prime minister suffers the casualties of war," Burg said. "He doesn't sleep at night. He knows what Uri Grossman represents."

Jeffrey Goldberg, an *Atlantic* national correspondent, is the author of *Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror,* published this year in paperback.

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The audacity of Bill Cosby's black conservatism

BY TA-NEHISI COATES

'This Is How We Lost to the White Man'

Last summer, in Detroit's St. Paul Church of God in Christ, I watched Bill Cosby summon his inner Malcolm X. It was a hot July evening. Cosby was speaking to an audience of black men dressed in everything from Enyce T-shirts or polos to blazers and ties. Some were there with their sons. Some were there in wheelchairs. The audience was packed tight, rows of folding chairs extended beyond the wooden pews to capture the overflow. But the chairs were not enough, and late arrivals stood against the long shotgun walls, or out in the small lobby, where they hoped to catch a snatch of Cosby's oratory. »

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For an interview with Ta-Nehisi Coates about this article and his new memoir, *The Beautiful Struggle*, visit www.theatlantic.com/coates.

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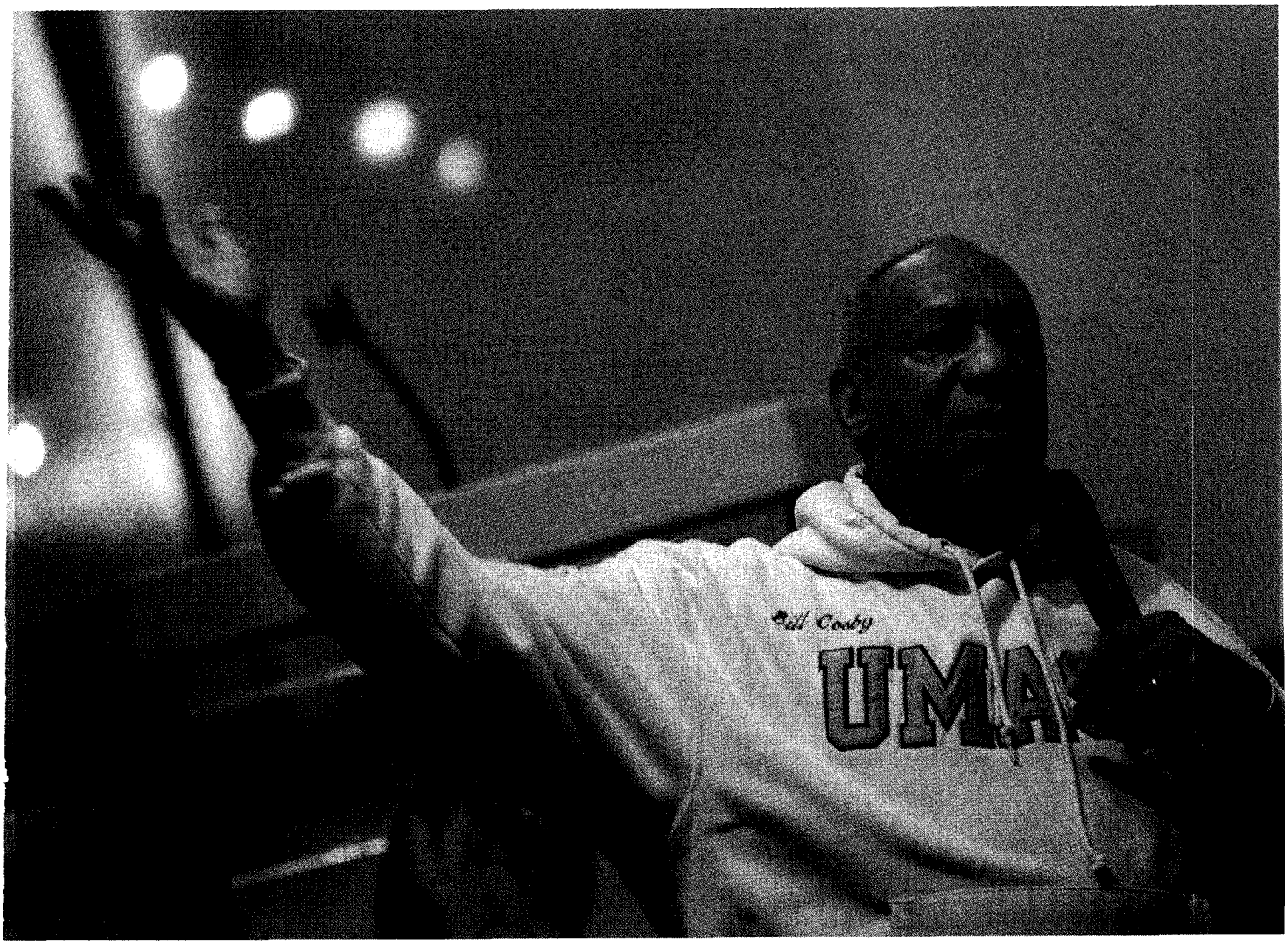

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Clutching a cordless mic, Cosby paced the front of the church, shifting between prepared remarks and comic ad-libs. A row of old black men, community elders, sat behind him, nodding and grunting throaty affirmations. The rest of the church was in full call-and-response mode, punctuating Cosby's punch lines with laughter, applause, or cries of "Teach, black man! Teach!"

He began with the story of a black girl who'd risen to become valedictorian of his old high school, despite having been abandoned by her father. "She spoke to the graduating class and her speech started like this," Cosby said. "'I was 5 years old. It was Saturday and I stood looking out the window, waiting for him.' She never said what helped turn her around. She never mentioned her mother, grandmother, or great-grandmother."

"Understand me," Cosby said, his face contorted and clenched like a fist. "Men? Men? Men! Where are you, men?"

Audience: "Right here!"

Cosby had come to Detroit aiming to grab the city's black men by their collars and shake them out of the torpor that has left so many of them—like so many of their peers across the country—undereducated, overincarcerated, and underrepresented in the ranks of active fathers. No women were in the audience. No reporters were allowed, for fear that their presence might frighten off fathers behind on their child-support payments. But I was there, trading on race, gender, and a promise not to interview any of the allegedly skittish participants.

"Men, if you want to win, we can win," Cosby said. "We are not a pitiful race of people. We are a bright race, who can move with the best. But we are in a new time, where people are behaving in abnormal ways and calling it normal ... When they used to come into our neighborhoods, we put the kids in the basement, grabbed a rifle, and said, 'By any means necessary.'

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"I don't want to talk about hatred of these people," he continued. "I'm talking about a time when we protected our women and protected our children. Now I got people in wheelchairs, paralyzed. A little girl in Camden, jumping rope, shot through the mouth. Grandmother saw it out the window. And people are waiting around for Jesus to come, when Jesus is already within you."

Cosby was wearing his standard uniform—dark sunglasses, loafers, a sweat suit emblazoned with the seal of an institution of higher learning. That night it was the University of Massachusetts, where he'd gotten his doctorate in education 30 years ago. He was preaching from the book of black self-reliance, a gospel that he has spent the past four years carrying across the country in a series of events that he bills as "call-outs." "My problem," Cosby told the audience, "is I'm tired of losing to white people. When I say I don't care about white people, I mean let them say what they want to say. What can they say to me that's worse than what their grandfather said?"

From Birmingham to Cleveland and Baltimore, at churches and colleges, Cosby has been telling thousands of black Americans that racism in America is omnipresent but that it can't be an excuse to stop striving. As Cosby sees it, the antidote to racism is not rallies, protests, or pleas, but strong families and communities. Instead of focusing on some abstract notion of equality, he argues, blacks need to cleanse their culture, embrace personal responsibility, and reclaim the traditions that fortified them in the past. Driving Cosby's tough talk about values and responsibility is a vision starkly different from Martin Luther King's gauzy, all-inclusive dream: it's an America of competing powers, and a black America that is no longer content to be the weakest of the lot.

It's heady stuff, especially coming from the man white America remembers as a sitcom star and affable pitchman for E. F. Hutton, Kodak, and Jell-O Pudding Pops. And Cosby's race-based crusade is particularly jarring now. Across the country, as black politics has become more professionalized, the rhetoric of race is giving way to the rhetoric of standards and results. Newark's young Ivy League–educated mayor, Cory Booker, ran for office promising competence and crime reduction, as did Washington's mayor, Adrian Fenty. Indeed, we are now enjoying a moment of national self-congratulation over racial progress, with a black man running for president as the very realization of King's dream. Barack Obama defied efforts by the Clinton campaign to pigeonhole him as a "black" candidate, casting himself instead as the symbol of a society that has moved beyond lazy categories of race.

Black America does not entirely share the euphoria, though. The civil-rights generation is exiting the American stage—not in a haze of nostalgia but in a cloud of gloom, troubled by the persistence of racism, the apparent weaknesses of the generation following in its wake, and the seeming indifference of much of the country to black America's fate. In that climate, Cosby's gospel of discipline, moral reform, and self-reliance offers a way out—a promise that one need not cure America of its original sin in order to succeed. Racism may not be extinguished, but it can be beaten.

Has Dr. Huxtable, the head of one of America's most beloved television households, seen the truth: that the dream of integration should never supplant the pursuit of self-respect; that blacks should worry more about judging themselves and less about whether whites are judging them on the content of their character? Or has he lost his mind?

From the moment he registered in the American popular consciousness, as the Oxford-educated Alexander Scott in the NBC adventure series *I Spy*, Cosby proffered the idea of an America that transcended race. The series, which started in 1965, was the first weekly show to feature an African American in a lead role, but it rarely factored race into dialogue or plots. Race was also mostly inconspicuous in Cosby's performances as a hugely popular stand-up comedian. "I don't spend my hours worrying how to slip a social message into my act," Cosby told *Playboy* in 1969. He also said that he didn't "have time to sit around and worry whether all the black people of the world make it because of me. I have my own gig to worry about." His crowning artistic and commercial achievement—*The Cosby Show*, which ran from 1984 to 1992—was seemingly a monument to that understated sensibility.

In fact, blackness was never absent from the show or from Bill Cosby. Plots involved black artists like Stevie Wonder or Dizzy Gillespie. The Huxtables' home was decorated with the works of black artists like Annie Lee, and the show featured black theater veterans such as Roscoe Lee Brown and Moses Gunn. Behind the scenes, Cosby hired the Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint to make sure that the show never trafficked in stereotypes and that it depicted blacks in a dignified light. Picking up Cosby's fixation on education, Poussaint had writers insert references to black schools. "If the script mentioned Oberlin, Texas Tech, or Yale, we'd circle it and tell them to mention a black college," Poussaint told me in a phone interview last year. "I remember going to work the next day and white people saying, 'What's the school called Morehouse?'" In 1985, Cosby riled NBC by placing an anti-apartheid sign in his Huxtable son's bedroom. The network wanted no part of the debate. "There may be two sides to apartheid in Archie Bunker's house," the *Toronto Star* quoted Cosby as saying. "But it's impossible that the Huxtables would be on any side but one. That sign will stay on that door. And I've told NBC that if they still want it down, or if they try to edit it out, there will be no show." The sign stayed.

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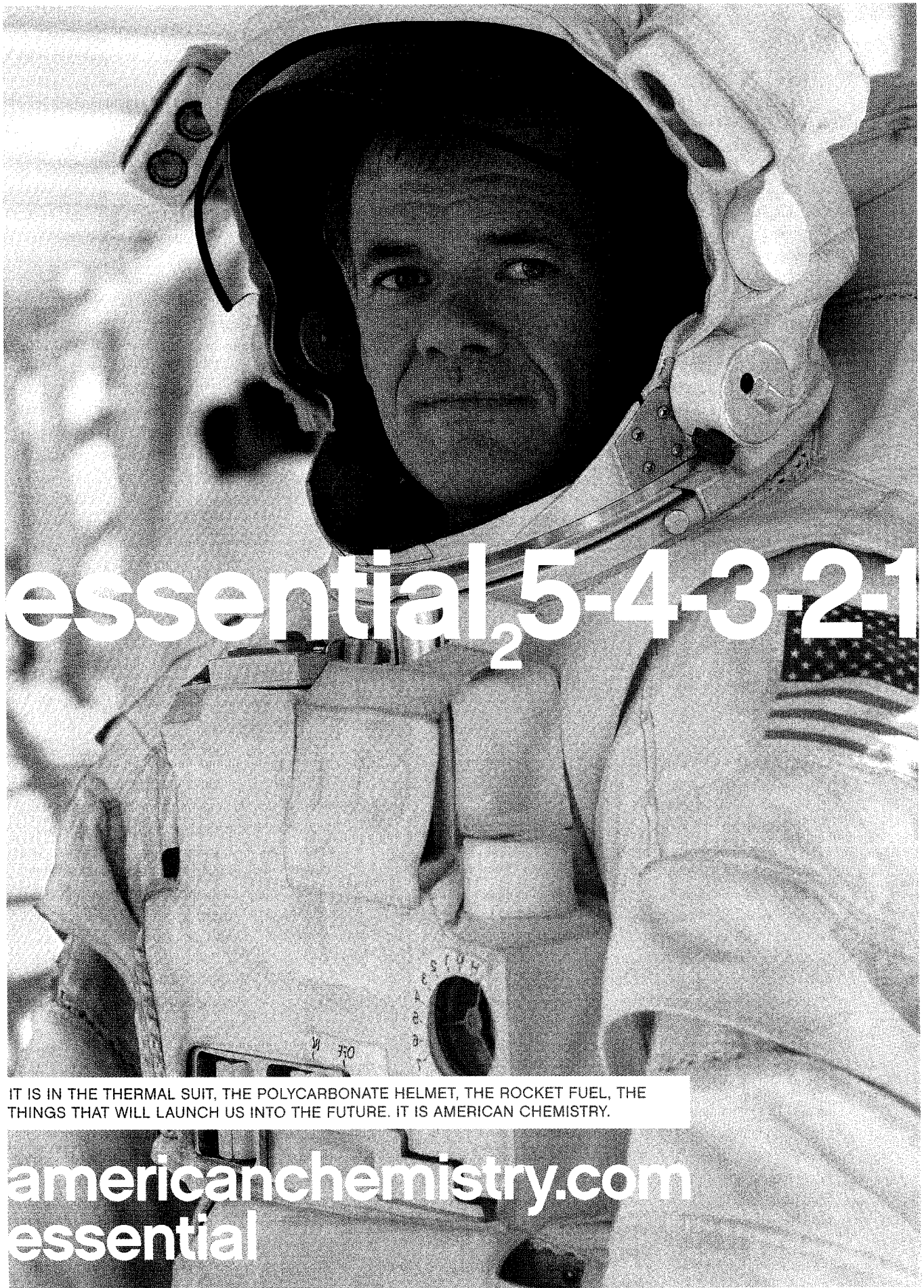

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Offstage, Cosby's philanthropy won him support among the civil-rights crowd. He made his biggest splash in 1988, when he and his wife gave $20 million to Spelman College, the largest individual donation ever given to a black college. "Two million would have been fantastic; 20 million, to use the language of the hip-hop generation, was off the chain," says Johnnetta Cole, who was then president of Spelman. Race again came to the fore in 1997, when Cosby's son was randomly shot and killed while fixing a flat on a Los Angeles freeway. His wife wrote an op-ed in *USA Today* arguing that white racism lay behind her son's death. "All African-Americans, regardless of their educational and economic accomplishments, have been and are at risk in America simply because of their skin colors," she wrote. "Most people know that facing the truth brings about healing and growth. When is America going to face its historical and current racial realities so it can be what it says it is?"

The column caused a minor row, but most of white America took little notice. To them, Cosby was still America's Dad. But those close to Cosby were not surprised. Cosby was an avowed race man, who, like much of his generation, had come to feel that black America had lost its way. The crisis of absentee fathers, the rise of black-on-black crime, and the spread of hip-hop all led Cosby to believe that, after the achievements of the 1960s, the black community was committing cultural suicide.

His anger and frustration erupted into public view during an NAACP awards ceremony in Washington in 2004 commemorating the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*. At that moment, the shades of mortality and irrelevance seemed to be drawing over the civil-rights generation. Its matriarchs, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, would be dead within two years. The NAACP's membership rolls had been shrinking; within months, its president, Kweisi Mfume, would resign (it was later revealed that he was under investigation by the NAACP for sexual harassment and nepotism—allegations that he denied). Other movement leaders were drifting into self-parody: Al Sharpton would soon be hosting a reality show and, a year later, would be doing ads for a predatory loan company; Sharpton and Jesse Jackson had recently asked MGM to issue an apology for the hit movie *Barbershop*.

That night, Cosby was one of the last honorees to take the podium. He began by noting that although civil-rights activists had opened the door for black America, young people today, instead of stepping through, were stepping backward. "No longer is a person embarrassed because they're pregnant without a husband," he told the crowd. "No longer is a boy considered an embarrassment if he tries to run away from being the father of the unmarried child."

There was cheering as Cosby went on. Perhaps sensing that he had the crowd, he grew looser. "The lower-economic and lower-middle-economic people are not holding their end in this deal," he told the audience.

Cosby disparaged activists who charge the criminal-justice system with racism. "These are people going around stealing Coca-Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake," Cosby said. "Then we all run out and are outraged: 'The cops shouldn't have shot him.' What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand? I wanted a piece of pound cake just as bad as anybody else. And I looked at it and I had no money. And something called parenting said, 'If you get caught with it, you're going to embarrass your mother.'"

Instead of focusing on some abstract notion of equality, Cosby argues, blacks need to cleanse their culture, embrace personal responsibility, and reclaim the traditions that fortified them in the past.

Then he attacked African American naming traditions, and the style of dress among young blacks: "Ladies and gentlemen, listen to these people. They are showing you what's wrong ... What part of Africa did this come from? We are not Africans. Those people are not Africans. They don't know a damned thing about Africa—with names like Shaniqua, Shaligua, Mohammed, and all that crap, and all of them are in jail." About then, people began to walk out of the auditorium and cluster in the lobby. There was still cheering, but some guests milled around and wondered what had happened. Some thought old age had gotten the best of Cosby. The mood was one of shock.

After what has come to be known as "the Pound Cake speech"—it has its own Wikipedia entry—Cosby came under attack from various quarters of the black establishment. The playwright August Wilson commented, "A billionaire attacking poor people for being poor. Bill Cosby is a clown. What do you expect?" One of the gala's hosts, Ted Shaw, the director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, called his comments "a harsh attack on poor black people in particular." Dubbing Cosby an "Afristocrat in Winter," the

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Georgetown University professor Michael Eric Dyson came out with a book, *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?*, that took issue with Cosby's bleak assessment of black progress and belittled his transformation from vanilla humorist to social critic and moral arbiter. "While Cosby took full advantage of the civil rights struggle," argued Dyson, "he resolutely denied it a seat at his artistic table."

But Cosby's rhetoric played well in black barbershops, churches, and backyard barbecues, where a unique brand of conservatism still runs strong. Outsiders may have heard haranguing in Cosby's language and tone. But much of black America heard instead the possibility of changing their communities without having to wait on the consciences and attention spans of policy makers who might not have their interests at heart. Shortly after Cosby took his Pound Cake message on the road, I wrote an article denouncing him as an elitist. When my father, a former Black Panther, read it, he upbraided me for attacking what he saw as a message of black empowerment. Cosby's argument has resonated with the black mainstream for just that reason.

The split between Cosby and critics such as Dyson mirrors not only America's broader conservative/liberal split but black America's own historic intellectual divide. Cosby's most obvious antecedent is Booker T. Washington. At the turn of the 20th century, Washington married a defense of the white South with a call for black self-reliance and became the most prominent black leader of his day. He argued that southern whites should be given time to adjust to emancipation; in the meantime, blacks should advance themselves not by voting and running for office but by working, and ultimately owning, the land.

W. E. B. Du Bois, the integrationist model for the Dysons of our day, saw Washington as an apologist for white racism and thought that his willingness to sacrifice the black vote was heretical. History ultimately rendered half of Washington's argument moot. His famous Atlanta Compromise—in which he endorsed segregation as a temporary means of making peace with southerners—was answered by lynchings, land theft, and general racial terrorism. But Washington's appeal to black self-sufficiency endured.

After Washington's death, in 1915, the black conservative tradition he had fathered found a permanent and natural home in the emerging ideology of Black Nationalism. Marcus Garvey, its patron saint, turned the Atlanta Compromise on its head, implicitly endorsing segregation not as an olive branch to whites but as a statement of black supremacy. Black Nationalists scorned the Du Boisian integrationists as stooges or traitors, content to beg for help from people who hated them.

Garvey argued that blacks had rendered themselves unworthy of the white man's respect. "The greatest stumbling block in the way of progress in the race has invariably come from within the race itself," wrote Garvey. "The monkey wrench of destruction as thrown into the cog of Negro Progress, is not thrown so much by the outsider as by the very fellow who is in our fold, and who should be the first to grease the wheel of progress rather than seeking to impede." Decades later, Malcolm X echoed that sentiment, faulting blacks for failing to take charge of their destinies. "The white man is too intelligent to let someone else come and gain control of the economy of his community," Malcolm said. "But you will let anybody come in and take control of the economy of your community, control the housing, control the education, control the jobs, control the businesses, under the pretext that you want to integrate. No, you're out of your mind."

Black conservatives like Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, have at times allied themselves with black liberals. But in general, they have upheld a core of beliefs laid out by Garvey almost a century ago: a skepticism of (white) government as a mediating force in the "Negro problem," a strong belief in the singular will of black people, and a fixation on a supposedly glorious black past.

Those beliefs also animate *Come On People*, the manifesto that Cosby and Poussaint published last fall. Although it does not totally dismiss government programs, the book mostly advocates solutions from within as a cure for black America's dismal vital statistics. "Once we find our bearings," they write, "we can move forward, as we have always done, on the path from victims to victors." *Come On People* is heavy on black pride ("no group of people has had the impact on the culture of the whole world that African Americans have had, and much of that impact has been for the good"), and heavier on the idea of the Great Fall—the theory, in this case, that post–Jim Crow blacks have lost touch with the cultural traditions that enabled them to persevere through centuries of oppression.

"For all the woes of segregation, there were some good things to come out of it," Cosby and Poussaint write. "One was that it forced us to take care of ourselves. When restaurants, laundries, hotels, theaters, groceries, and clothing stores were segregated, black people opened and ran their own. Black life insurance companies and banks thrived, as well as black funeral homes ... Such successes provided jobs and strength to black economic well-being. They also gave black people that gratifying sense of an interdependent community." Although the authors take pains to put some distance between themselves and the Nation of Islam, they approvingly quote one of its ministers who spoke at a call-out in Compton, California: "I went to Koreatown today and I met with the Korean

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merchants," the minister told the crowd. "I love them. You know why? They got a place called what? Koreatown. When I left them, I went to Chinatown. They got a place called what? Chinatown. Where is your town?"

The notion of the Great Fall, and the attendant theory that segregation gave rise to some "good things," are the stock-in-trade of what Christopher Alan Bracey, a law professor at Washington University, calls (in his book, *Saviors or Sellouts*) the "organic" black conservative tradition: conservatives who favor hard work and moral reform over protests and government intervention, but whose black-nationalist leanings make them anathema to the Heritage Foundation and Rush Limbaugh. When political strategists argue that the Republican Party is missing a huge chance to court the black community, they are thinking of this mostly male bloc—the old guy in the barbershop, the grizzled Pop Warner coach, the retired Vietnam vet, the drunk uncle at the family reunion. He votes Democratic, not out of any love for abortion rights or progressive taxation, but because he feels—in fact, he knows—that the modern-day GOP draws on the support of people who hate him. This is the audience that flocks to Cosby: culturally conservative black Americans who are convinced that integration, and to some extent the entire liberal dream, robbed them of their natural defenses.

"There are things that we did not see coming," Cosby told me over lunch in Manhattan last year. "Like, you could see the Klan, but because these things were not on a horse, because there was no white sheet, and the people doing the deed were not white, we saw things in the light of family and forgiveness ... We didn't pay attention to the dropout rate. We didn't pay attention to the fathers, to the self-esteem of our boys."

Given the state of black America, it is hard to quarrel with that analysis. Blacks are 13 percent of the population, yet black men account for 49 percent of America's murder victims and 41 percent of the prison population. The teen birth rate for blacks is 63 per 1,000, more than double the rate for whites. In 2005, black families had the lowest median income of any ethnic group measured by the Census, making only 61 percent of the median income of white families.

Most troubling is a recent study released by the Pew Charitable Trusts, which concluded that the rate at which blacks born into the middle class in the 1960s backslid into poverty or near-poverty (45 percent) was three times that of whites—suggesting that the advances of even some of the most successful cohorts of black America remain tenuous at best. Another Pew survey, released last November, found that blacks were "less upbeat about the state of black progress now than at any time since 1983."

The rise of the organic black conservative tradition is also a response to America's retreat from its second attempt at Reconstruction. Blacks have watched as the courts have weakened affirmative action, arguably the country's greatest symbol of state-sponsored inclusion. They've seen a fraudulent war on drugs that, judging by the casualties, looks like a war on black people. They've seen themselves bandied about as playthings in the presidential campaigns of Ronald Reagan (with his 1980 invocation of "states' rights" in Mississippi), George Bush (Willie Horton), Bill Clinton (Sister Souljah), and George W. Bush (McCain's fabled black love-child). They've seen the utter failures of school busing and housing desegregation, as well as the horrors of Katrina. The result is a broad distrust of government as the primary tool for black progress.

During the 1990s, as gangsta rap exploded, teen pregnancy and the murder rate among black men declined.
Should we give the blue ribbon in citizenship to Dr. Dre?

In May 2004, just one day before Cosby's Pound Cake speech, *The New York Times* visited Louisville, Kentucky, once ground zero in the fight to integrate schools. But *The Times* found that sides had switched, and that black parents were more interested in educational progress than in racial parity. "Integration? What was it good for?" one parent asked. "They were just setting up our babies to fail."

In response to these perceived failures, many black activists have turned their efforts inward. Geoffrey Canada's ambitious Harlem Children's Zone project pushes black students to change their study habits and improve their home life. In cities like Baltimore and New York, community groups are focusing on turning black men into active fathers. In Philadelphia last October, thousands of black men packed the Liacouras Center, pledging to patrol their neighborhoods and help combat the rising murder rate. When Cosby came to St. Paul Church in Detroit, one local judge got up and urged Cosby and other black celebrities to donate more money to advance the cause. "I didn't fly out here to write a check," Cosby retorted. "I'm not writing a check in Houston, Detroit, or Philadelphia. Leave these athletes alone. All you know is Oprah Winfrey

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Most commented.

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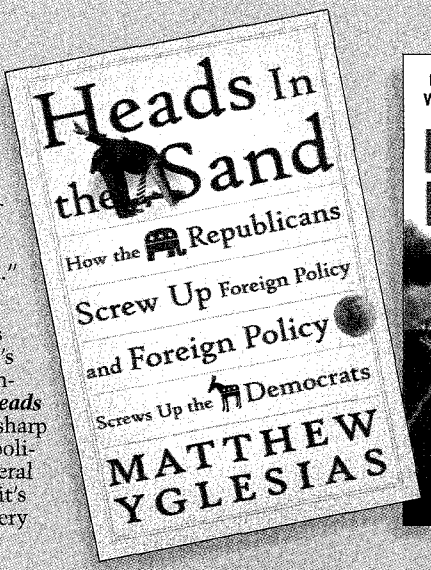

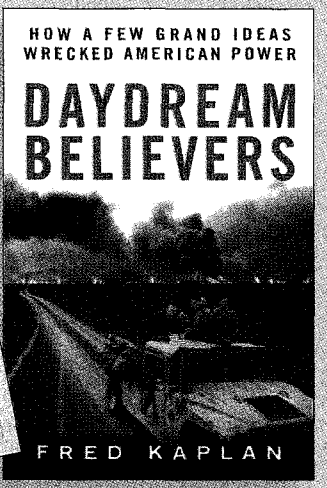

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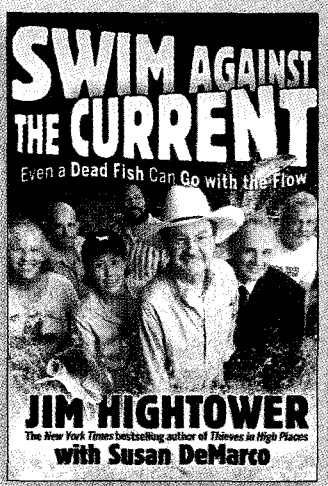
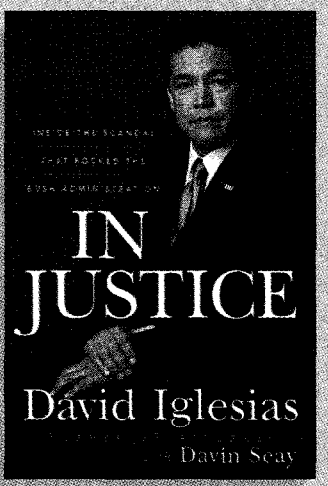
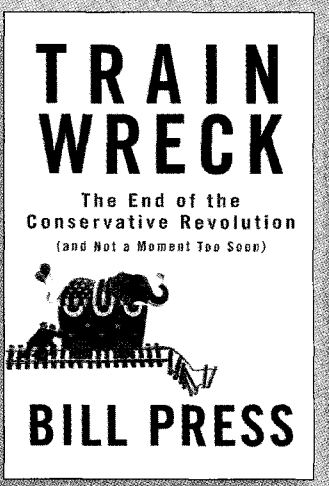


"Hightower leaves us laughing and thinking at the same time."—Studs Terkel



"Iglesias' book reminds us that while his former bosses may shred the e-mails, sack the bumblers, obstruct Congress and...try to gum this scandal to death, the truth will come out, eventually."
—Dahlia Lithwick



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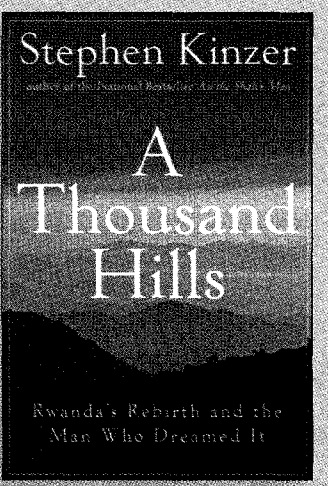

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—Walter Isaacson

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and Michael Jackson. Forget about a check ... This is how we lost to the white man. 'Judge said Bill Cosby is gonna write a check, but until then ... '"

Instead of waiting for handouts or outside help, Cosby argues, disadvantaged blacks should start by purging their own culture of noxious elements like gangsta rap, a favorite target. "What do record producers think when they churn out that gangsta rap with antisocial, women-hating messages?," Cosby and Poussaint ask in their book. "Do they think that black male youth won't act out what they have repeated since they were old enough to listen?" Cosby's rhetoric on culture echoes—and amplifies—a swelling strain of black opinion: last November's Pew study reported that 71 percent of blacks feel that rap is a bad influence.

The strain of black conservatism that Cosby evokes has also surfaced in the presidential campaign of Barack Obama. Early on, some commentators speculated that Obama's Cosby-esque appeals to personal responsibility would cost him black votes. But if his admonishments for black kids to turn off the PlayStation and for black fathers to do their jobs did him any damage, it was not reflected at the polls. In fact, this sort of rhetoric amounts to something of a racial double play, allowing Obama and Cosby to cater both to culturally conservative blacks and to whites who are convinced that black America is a bastion of decadence. (Curiously, Cosby is noncommittal verging on prickly when it comes to Obama. When Larry King asked him whether he supported Obama, he bristled: "Do you ask white people this question? ... I want to know why this fellow especially is brought up in such a special way. How many Americans in the media really take him seriously, or do they look at him like some prize brown baby?" The exchange ended with Cosby professing admiration for Dennis Kucinich. Months later, he rebuffed my requests for his views on Obama's candidacy.)

The shift in focus from white racism to black culture is not as new as some social commentators make it out to be. Standing in St. Paul Church on that July evening listening to Cosby, I remembered the last time The Street felt like this: in the summer of 1994, after Louis Farrakhan announced the Million Man March. Farrakhan barnstormed the country holding "men only" meetings (but much larger). I saw him in my native Baltimore, while home from Howard University on vacation. The march itself was cathartic. I walked with four or five other black men, and all along the way black women stood on porches or out on the street, shouting, clapping, cheering. For us, Farrakhan's opinions on the Jews mostly seemed beside the point; what stuck was the chance to assert our humanity and our manhood by marching on the Mall, and not acting like we were all fresh out of San Quentin. We lived in the shadow of the '80s crack era. So many of us had been jailed or were on our way. So many of us were fathers in biology only. We believed ourselves disgraced and clung to the march as a public statement: the time had come to grow up.

Black conservatives have been dipping into this well of lost black honor since the turn of the 20th century. On the one hand, vintage black nationalists have harked back to a golden age of black Africa, where mighty empires sprawled and everyone was a king. Meanwhile, populist black conservatives like Cosby point to pre-1968 black America as an era when blacks were united in the struggle: men were men, and a girl who got pregnant without getting married would find herself bundled off to Grandpa's farm.

What both visions share is a sense that black culture in its present form is bastardized and pathological. What they also share is a foundation in myth. Black people are not the descendants of kings. We are—and I say this with big pride—the progeny of slaves. If there's any majesty in our struggle, it lies not in fairy tales but in those humble origins and the great distance we've traveled since. Ditto for the dreams of a separate but noble past. Cosby's, and much of black America's, conservative analysis flattens history and smooths over the wrinkles that have characterized black America since its inception.

Indeed, a century ago, the black brain trust was pushing the same rhetoric that Cosby is pushing today. It was concerned that slavery had essentially destroyed the black family and was obsessed with seemingly the same issues—crime, wanton sexuality, and general moral turpitude—that Cosby claims are recent developments. "The early effort of middle-class blacks to respond to segregation was, aside from a political agenda, focused on a social-reform agenda," says Khalil G. Muhammad, a professor of American history at Indiana University. "The National Association of Colored Women, Du Bois in *The Philadelphia Negro*, all shared a sense of anxiety that African Americans were not presenting their best selves to the world. There was the sense that they were committing crimes and needed to keep their sexuality in check." Adds William Jelani Cobb, a professor of American history at Spelman College: "The same kind of people who were advocating for social reform were denigrating people because they didn't play piano. They often saw themselves as reluctant caretakers of the less enlightened."

In particular, Cosby's argument—that much of what haunts young black men originates in post-segregation black culture—doesn't square with history. As early as the 1930s, sociologists were concerned that black men were falling behind black women. In his classic study, *The Negro Family in the United States*, published in 1939, E. Franklin Frazier argued that urbanization was undermining the ability of men to provide for their families. In 1965—at the height of the civil-rights movement—Daniel Patrick Moynihan's milestone report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," picked up the same theme.

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At times, Cosby seems willfully blind to the parallels between his arguments and those made in the presumably glorious past. Consider his problems with rap. How could an avowed jazz fanatic be oblivious to the similar plaints once sparked by the music of his youth? "The tired longshoreman, the porter, the housemaid and the poor elevator boy in search of recreation, seeking in jazz the tonic for weary nerves and muscles," wrote the lay historian J. A. Rogers, "are only too apt to find the bootlegger, the gambler and the demi-monde who have come there for victims and to escape the eyes of the police."

Beyond the apocryphal notion that black culture was once a fount of virtue, there's still the charge that culture is indeed the problem. But to reach that conclusion, you'd have to stand on some rickety legs. The hip-hop argument, again, is particularly creaky. Ronald Ferguson, a Harvard social scientist, has highlighted that an increase in hip-hop's popularity during the early 1990s corresponded with a declining amount of time spent reading among black kids. But gangsta rap can be correlated with other phenomena, too—many of them positive. During the 1990s, as gangsta rap exploded, teen pregnancy and the murder rate among black men declined. Should we give the blue ribbon in citizenship to Dr. Dre?

"I don't know how to measure culture. I don't know how to test its effects, and I'm not sure anyone else does," says the Georgetown economist Harry Holzer. "There's a liberal story that limited opportunities, and barriers, lead to employment problems and criminal records, but then there's another story that has to do with norms, behaviors, and oppositional culture. You can't prove the latter statistically, but it still might be true." Holzer thinks that both arguments contain truth and that one doesn't preclude the other. Fair enough. Suffice it to say, though, that the evidence supporting structural inequality is compelling. In 2001, a researcher sent out black and white job applicants in Milwaukee, randomly assigning them a criminal record. The researcher concluded that a white man with a criminal record had about the same chance of getting a job as a black man without one. Three years later, researchers produced the same results in New York under more-rigorous conditions.

The accepted wisdom is that such studies are a comfort to black people, allowing them to wallow in their misery. In fact, the opposite is true—the liberal notion that blacks are still, after a century of struggle, victims of pervasive discrimination is the ultimate collective buzz-kill. It effectively means that African Americans must, on some level, accept that their children will be "less than" until some point in the future when white racism miraculously abates. That's not the sort of future that any black person eagerly awaits, nor does it make for particularly motivating talking points.

Last summer, I watched Cosby give a moving commencement speech to a group of Connecticut inmates who'd just received their GEDs. Before the speech, at eight in the morning, Cosby quizzed correctional officials on the conditions and characteristics of their inmate population. I wished, then, that my 7-year-old son could have seen Cosby there, to take in the same basic message that I endeavor to serve him every day—that manhood means more than virility and strut, that it calls for discipline and dutiful stewardship. That the ultimate fate of black people lies in their own hands, not in the hands of their antagonists. That as an African American, he has a duty to his family, his community, and his ancestors.

If Cosby's call-outs simply ended at that—a personal and communal creed—there'd be little to oppose. But Cosby often pits the rhetoric of personal responsibility against the legitimate claims of American citizens for their rights. He chides activists for pushing to reform the criminal-justice system, despite solid evidence that the criminal-justice system needs reform. His historical amnesia—his assertion that many of the problems that pervade black America are of a recent vintage—is simply wrong, as is his contention that today's young African Americans are somehow weaker, that they've dropped the ball. And for all its positive energy, his language of uplift has its limitations. After the Million Man March, black men embraced a sense of hope and promise. We were supposed to return to our communities and families inspired by a new feeling of responsibility. Yet here we are again, almost 15 years later, with seemingly little tangible change. I'd take my son to see Bill Cosby, to hear his message, to revel in its promise and optimism. But afterward, he and I would have a very long talk.

Part of what drives Cosby's activism, and reinforces his message, is the rage that lives in all African Americans, a collective feeling of disgrace that borders on self-hatred.

On the day last summer when Cosby met me for lunch in the West Village, it was raining, as it had been all week, and New York was experiencing a record-cold August. Cosby had just come from

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Max Roach's funeral and was dressed in a natty three-piece suit. Despite the weather, the occasion, and the oddly empty dining room, Cosby was energized. He had spent the previous day in Philadelphia, where he spoke to a group in a housing project, met with state health officials, and participated in a community march against crime. Grassroots black activists in his hometown were embracing his call. He planned, over the coming year, to continue his call-outs and release a hip-hop album. (He has also noted, however, that there won't be any profanity on it.)

Cosby was feeling warm and nostalgic. He asked why I had not brought my son, and I instantly regretted dropping him off at my partner's workplace for a couple of hours. He talked about breaking his shoulder playing school football, after his grandfather had tried to get him to quit. "Granddad Cosby got on the trolley and came over to the apartment," he recalled. "I was so embarrassed. I was laid out on the sofa. He was talking to my parents, and I was waiting for the moment when he would say, 'See, I told you, Junior.' He came back and reached in his pocket and gave me a quarter. He said, 'Go to the corner and get some ice cream. It has calcium in it.'"

Much pop psychology has been devoted to Cosby's transformation into such a high-octane, high-profile activist. His nemesis Dyson says that Cosby, in his later years, is following in the dishonorable tradition of upper-class African Americans who denounce their less fortunate brethren. Others have suggested more-sinister motivations—that Cosby is covering for his own alleged transgressions. (In 2006, Cosby settled a civil lawsuit filed by a woman who claimed that he had sexually assaulted her; other women have come forward with similar allegations that have not gone to court.) But the depth of his commitment would seem to belie such suspicions, and in any case, they do not seem to have affected his hold on his audience: in the November Pew survey, 85 percent of all African American respondents considered him a "good influence" on the black community, above Obama (76 percent) and second only to Oprah Winfrey (87 percent).

Part of what drives Cosby's activism, and reinforces his message, is the rage that lives in all African Americans, a collective feeling of disgrace that borders on self-hatred. As the comedian Chris Rock put it in one of his infamous routines, "Everything white people don't like about black people, black people really don't like about black people ... It's like a civil war going on with black people, and it's two sides—there's black people and there's niggas, and niggas have got to go ... Boy, I wish they'd let me join the Ku Klux Klan. Shit, I'd do a drive-by from here to Brooklyn." (Rock stopped performing the routine when he noticed that his white fans were laughing a little too hard.) Liberalism, with its pat logic and focus on structural inequities, offers no balm for this sort of raw pain. Like the people he preaches to, Cosby has grown tired of hanging his head.

This disquiet spans generations, but it is most acute among those of the civil-rights era. "I don't know a better term than *angst*," says Johnnetta Cole. "I refuse to categorize every young African American with the same language, but there are some 'young'uns'—and some of us who are not 'young'uns'—who must turn around and look at where we are, because where we're headed isn't pretty." Like many of the stars of the civil-rights movement, Cole has gifts that go beyond social activism. She rose out of the segregated South and went to college at age 15, eventually earning a bachelor's from Oberlin and a doctorate in anthropology from Northwestern. That same sort of dynamism exists today among many younger blacks, but what troubles the older generation is that their energy seems directed at other pursuits besides social uplift.

Cosby is fond of saying that sacrifices of the '60s weren't made so that rappers and young people could repeatedly use the word *nigger*. But that's exactly why they were made. After all, chief among all individual rights awarded Americans is the right to be mediocre, crass, and juvenile—in other words, the right to be human. But Cosby is aiming for something superhuman—twice as good, as the elders used to say—and his homily to a hazy black past seems like an effort to redeem something more than the present.

When people hear Bill Cosby's message, many assume that he is the product of the sort of family he's promoting—two caring parents, a stable home life, a working father. In fact, like many of the men he admonishes, Cosby was born into a troubled home. He was raised by his mother because his father, who joined the Navy, abandoned the family when Cosby was a child. Speaking to me of his youth, Cosby said, "People told me I was bright, but nobody stayed on me. My mother was too busy trying to feed and clothe us." He was smart enough to be admitted to Central High School, a magnet school in Philadelphia, but transferred and then dropped out in 10th grade and followed his father into the service.

But the twists and turns of that reality seem secondary to the tidier, more appealing world that Cosby is trying to create. Toward the end of our lunch, in a long, rambling monologue, Cosby told me, "If you looked at me and said, 'Why is he doing this? Why right now?,' you could probably say, 'He's having a resurgence of his childhood.' What do I need if I am a child today? I need people to guide me. I need the possibility of change. I need people to stop saying I can't pull myself up by my own bootstraps. They say that's a myth. But these other people have their mythical stories—why can't we have our own?"

Ta-Nehisi Coates is the author of *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood*, published this month.

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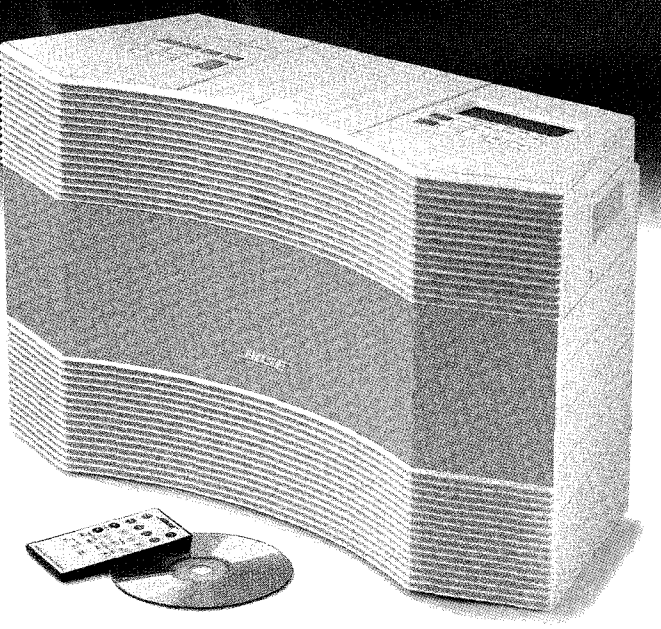

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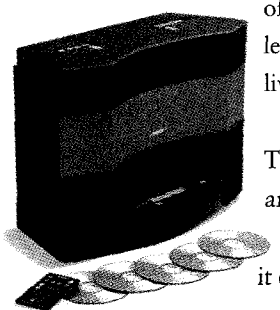

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How tiny jets, Soviet-trained math prodigies, American "ant farmers," and dot-com refugees are revolutionizing air travel

BY JAMES FALLOWS

Taxis in the Sky

True, a cover story I wrote for this magazine seven years ago, contending that the era of tiny, convenient, and relatively affordable jet airplanes was at hand, won an Article of the Year award from an aviation lobbying group. But it would be fair to describe the broader reaction as: Oh, sure! ("Freedom of the Skies," June 2001, was excerpted from my book *Free Flight*.) New and more fuel-efficient jet engines; new, quieter, and more comfortable small airplanes; new and more-automated ways of routing aircraft around bad weather and away from congested areas—these and other innovations, I wrote, might make a new kind of air travel more practical »

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For a slideshow about the air-taxi business, narrated by James Fallows, visit www.theatlantic.com/dayjet.

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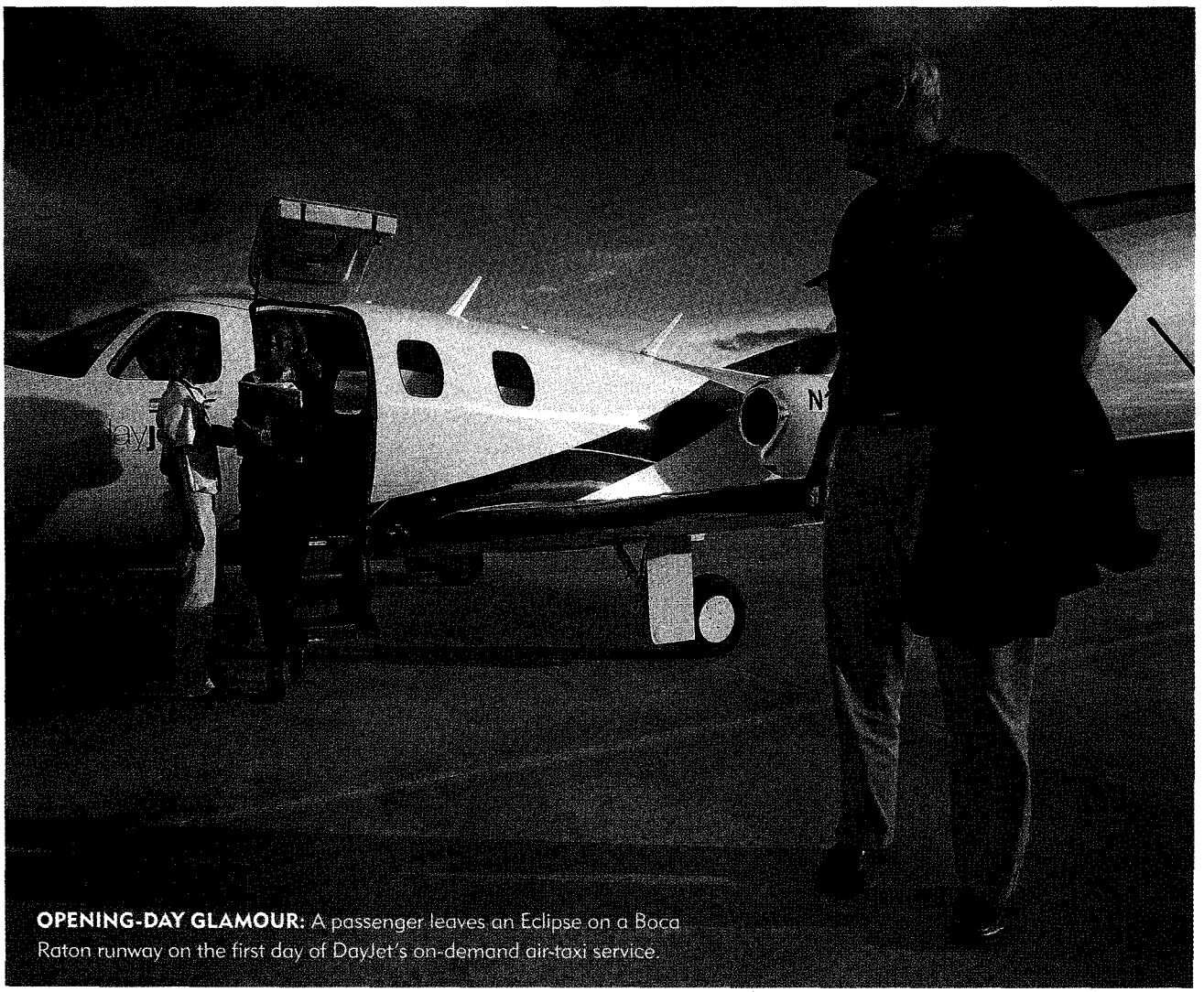

OPENING-DAY GLAMOUR: A passenger leaves an Eclipse on a Boca Raton runway on the first day of DayJet's on-demand air-taxi service.

JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

for more people. This wouldn't mean personal aviation in the Jetsons sense—a plane in every garage, people zooming around at will. But it might provide business travelers with something that until then only the truly rich had enjoyed: a fast and personalized alternative to the ever less delightful experience of travel on commercial airlines.

Most readers thought that personal airplanes, like personal yachts, would always be the playthings of the very rich. The familiar (and aptly named) Airbus or Boeing aircraft would have to do, as would impenetrable modern fare structures and the grind of big-airport congestion. It obviously didn't help that three months later, the use of passenger airplanes as terrorist tools put aviation in general under new limits and scrutiny. Allow new routes and possibilities for air travel? Ha! Everything air-related was destined to be more controlled.

And as if this change in circumstance weren't enough: a year after my article and book appeared, the company that had made the boldest promises about its ability to deliver a small, cheap jet—Eclipse Aviation, of Albuquerque, the very company I had featured in my story—revealed the humiliating news that the radically light and efficient new engine around which it had designed the airplane was just not going to work. Eclipse put plans for its vaunted new EA500 jet on hold until it could figure out a replacement engine.

Because of problems like these—and more—the aviation establishment has also been highly skeptical that light-jet air taxis could ever pay their way. The prominent analyst Richard Aboulafia, of the Teal Group, in suburban Washington, has argued that the potential market is so small, and the costs and risks so large, that the air-taxi concept is mainly hype and wishful thinking.

Certainly, the vision might turn out to be a mirage. Given the rocky history of most air-travel companies, that may be the most likely result. Still: early this year, on a visit home from China, I stepped inside one of those very same EA500 airplanes and took a 40-minute flight at more than 350 miles per hour. The plane took off from

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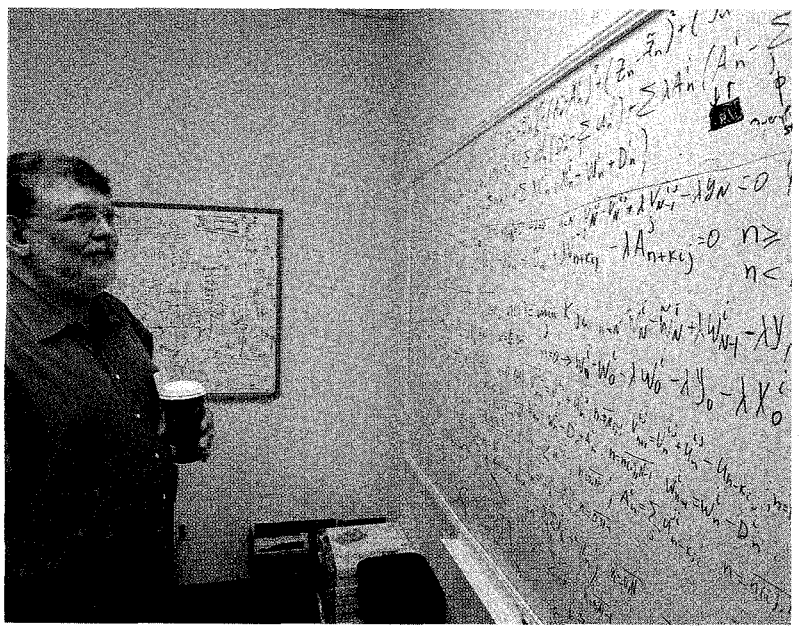
Boca Raton, Florida, which has a small airport but no commercial airline flights. It landed about 160 miles north in Florida at Lakeland, a sizable inland city with a large runway-and-terminal complex but no commercial flights. If I'd been driving, the trip would have taken about four hours. If I'd booked this seat on the plane (it was a free demo flight), I would have spent about $275—a tiny fraction of normal business-jet costs, and about $50 less than a US Airways shuttle between Washington and New York, which covers about the same distance.

Two pilots sat in the front of the airplane, whose interior is the size of an unusually roomy SUV's. After the plane had climbed above 10,000 feet, one of them turned around and offered to chat and answer questions. I sat in



CEO ED IACOBUCCI shows off some of the formulas DayJet's "ant farmers" have devised to keep planes and people moving.

the second row, in one of two leather bucket seats with as much legroom as domestic airlines offer in first class and plenty of room for working on a laptop or with an open briefcase. In the other seat was Bruce Holmes, a retired NASA official who had spent much of his career developing plans and promoting support for a "Small Aircraft Transportation System," which he imagined as a modern aerial complement to the interstate highways. There was space for one more passenger, in a seat behind us that had less legroom but as much as normal airline economy class. The plane is designed for shortish business trips rather than long hauls with a lot of cargo, but it allows up to 40 pounds of baggage per passenger.

The flight was operated by the DayJet company, the most successful and fastest-growing of several companies that are racing to put Holmes's vision into practice. Others include SATSAir and ImagineAir, which operate in the Southeast using propeller-driven Cirrus SR-22 airplanes, with four seats and a parachute that can bring the whole airplane down safely in an emergency. Linear Air, another new air-taxi company, serves cities in the Northeast with Cessna turboprops and Eclipse jets. At the beginning of last year, DayJet, which is based in Boca Raton, had 70 employees but no airplanes or paying customers. Last September, it carried its first paying customer on its first "on demand" flight (from Boca Raton to Tallahassee), meaning the customer—and not an airline schedule—specified when he wanted to leave and arrive. By the time I visited, this February, it was operating 28 Eclipse airplanes, serving 45 cities in Florida and the Southeast, and employing 270 people. By the end of this year, DayJet expects to be flying 100 airplanes, serving 100 destinations, and employing 800 people. Of the 350 customers who had used its service within the first three months, 40 percent had booked a repeat flight.

"We're not looking for people with straight aviation experience," the company's CFO, John Staten, told me when discussing its hiring plans. "We're looking for people who have been through the experience of *hypergrowth*." Like the company's founder and CEO, Ed Iacobucci, Staten and most of its other executives are veterans not of the aviation business but of software or Internet tech-world start-ups that went from concepts to multibillion-dollar businesses within a few years. "It's one thing to hear about that process, but until you've lived it, it's hard to understand how challenging it can be simply to manage the growth," Staten said.

How could a brand-new company in the chronically troubled aviation business have come so quickly to the point where its main challenge is growing too fast? And this through a period when security concerns of all sorts have risen, fuel prices have soared, environmental doubts about aviation have intensified, and airports and airways have become more congested by the day—and the economy of the company's home area, in southern Florida, has been through a real-estate crash?

The answer involves an odd assemblage of talents and disciplines that includes American computer scientists who call their specialty "ant farming"; Russian mathematical prodigies who made their way from Minsk and Moscow to Florida, via Jerusalem; Internet-business pioneers; and, yes, pilots and maintenance experts and dispatchers, including many refugees or retirees from the troubled airlines. Plus Bruce Holmes himself, who joined the company a year ago, after NASA radically cut back its airplane-related activities to shift its resources to space exploration.

DayJet's success to date has also depended on the confluence of several technologies that all matured at once. Indeed, the most startling aspect of its story is the insistence from top to bottom that at heart, it is not an

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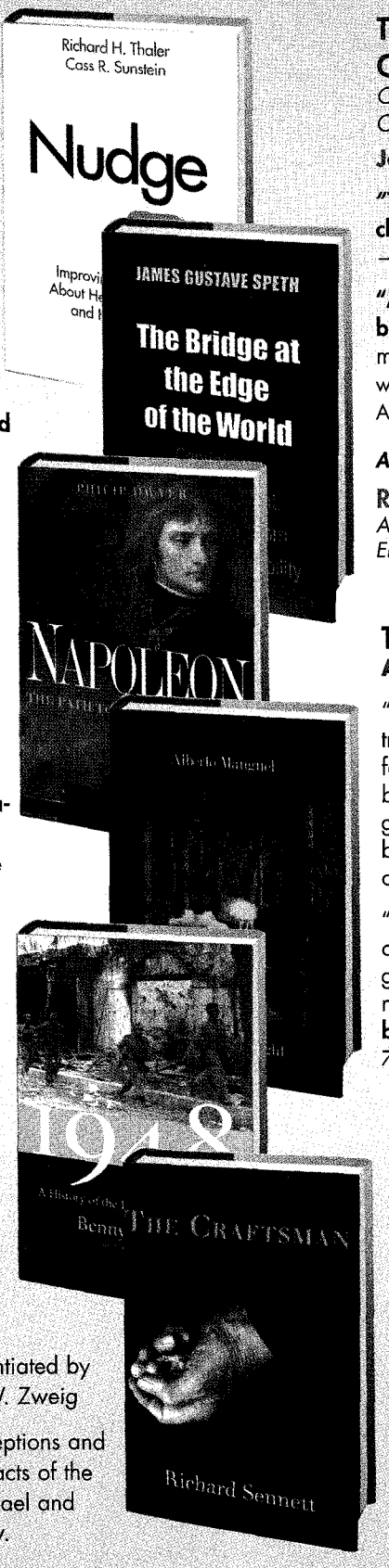

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aviation company at all. "You could think of us as really a software company," Jim Herriott, one of the ant farmers, told me. What he meant was that the Internet has become an unimaginably refined and powerful tool for routing packets of data from place to place. "We are about developing an Internet for stuff"—the stuff in this case being passengers in seats.

Ed Iacobucci, now in his early 50s, grew up outside Atlanta and studied computer science at Georgia Tech. He rose quickly within IBM and by the late 1980s was directing a joint Microsoft-IBM project to develop a new computer operating system called OS/2. It was technically elegant, but tensions between the two companies broke up the project and doomed the product. IBM soldiered on with its own, unpopular version of OS/2 for another decade (Microsoft applied its part of the work to Windows 95 and Windows NT), but Iacobucci quit in 1988 to start a new company, Citrix, that would work on similar software. Over the next decade, Citrix enjoyed its own hypergrowth, with Iacobucci as chairman. Several executives now at DayJet, and the Russian mathematicians, worked with him there. As he prospered, Iacobucci bought a Learjet for business travel. Then, in the tech collapse of 2000, Citrix's share price fell by 50 percent in a week. Iacobucci stepped down as chairman.

During the good times, his wife, Nancy, had started an air-charter business called Wingedfoot. It was a "traditional" charter business—that is, multimillion-dollar aircraft hired for very high fees by corporations or tycoons. By that time, Iacobucci was following the same aviation-world chatter I was, about the coming of small jets. The difference between a writer and an entrepreneur is this: the only thing I could figure out to do was write a book about it; by January 2002, Iacobucci and his wife had raised several million dollars from friends, family, and tech-industry investors to start work on a new air-taxi company. (They raised some $16 million from investors, in two rounds, from 2001 through 2006; then another $50 million in early 2007; then $140 million in debt financing, to buy airplanes, about a year ago.) They code-named the company Jetson Systems, which they wisely changed to DayJet when they announced their plans in 2003.

Here are some of the essential reasons that the new business was not as outlandish as the original name might have made it seem.

First, the airplanes. Eclipse, founded by another software-industry veteran who had worked with Iacobucci named Vern Raburn, promised to deliver fast, small jets for about $1 million apiece—versus five to 10 times that much for Gulfstreams, Falcons, Learjets, etc.—and to build them with advanced, Toyota-style lean-manufacturing techniques that would make them dramatically more reliable than current versions. Their efficient engines would also make them cheaper to operate, bringing the overall cost per mile of jet travel to a small fraction of the private-jet level. The price of an Eclipse has risen to about $1.5 million, but it is still much cheaper than alternative jets.

Next, the airports. Although unnoticed by most travelers, the United States is studded with airports, at least 3,500 of which have runways large enough to allow small, Eclipse-style jets to take off and land. The real value of these airports is that most of them stand nearly empty and could handle many more airplanes carrying people to and from the suburbs, office developments, factories, or recreation sites nearby. Most were built during an aviation boom that ended 50 years ago, and have barely been modernized since then. Bruce Holmes's efforts at NASA included exploring ways to make them all usable, even in bad weather—especially with safer, modern GPS-based landing systems.

And finally, the airlines. Despite the temporary dip in air travel after 9/11, compared with 2000, airlines now serve fewer cities, with less-frequent flights and often with smaller airplanes—but carry more people overall. And although a larger share of flights go through overcrowded hubs such as O'Hare, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Atlanta, those airports rarely add new runways. This has the same effect as trying to force more cars onto a given road: all of them slow down. Once in the sky, jets are as fast as ever, but cascading delays mean that the overall door-to-door speed of U.S. airline travel has been slowing down.

Iacobucci and his colleagues were sufficiently convinced of these advantages to keep raising money and laying plans, even as the air-travel industry reeled after 9/11. By early 2002, a team of 30—many of them

Last September, DayJet carried its first paying customer on its first 'on demand' flight, meaning the customer—and not an airline schedule—specified when he wanted to leave and arrive.

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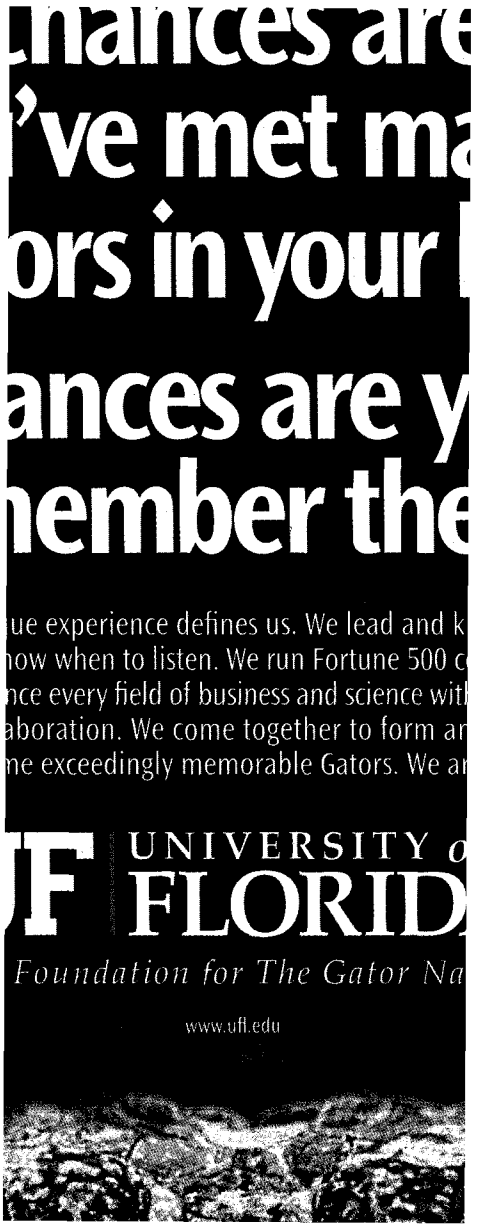

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from Citrix or other Internet companies—was working in Boca Raton. On Thanksgiving weekend of 2002, their own shock came: Vern Raburn announced that the Eclipse airplane would have to be redesigned because its ultralight new jet engine, adapted from the military's cruise-missile program, was not passing performance tests.

Eventually this crisis passed, when Pratt & Whitney Canada agreed to create a new engine for Eclipse that was only slightly heavier than the original design. But the delay lasted more than two years. (Eclipse has survived other crises, the gravest of which was a cash-flow emergency that threatened to put the company into bankruptcy late last year. A European consortium called ETIRC put more than $100 million into the company, in exchange for an agreement to open an Eclipse jet factory in Russia.) Eclipse still faces serious financial challenges, but aviation analysts I spoke with said that even if the company went bust, the airplane itself is attractive and proven enough that some other company would likely buy the rights to make and sell the plane.

But the engine problem changed everything for DayJet. By that time, it had agreed to buy as many as 300 Eclipse jets, and it expected to put them into service and start its business in 2004. "Suddenly we had a 27-month 'insertion' in the schedule," John Staten told me. The company couldn't make its first dollar until it got its first plane, and meanwhile it had a staff to pay. Members of the DayJet team fanned out to inspect small jets then being developed—by Honda, Cessna, Embraer, and others—and decided that it made the most sense to stick with Eclipse and wait. In retrospect, the two-plus years of forced gestation may have been a godsend to the company.

Here we come to the members of the DayJet team I was most surprised to find at its headquarters, and the ones who, according to Ed Iacobucci, are the real secrets to its success. These are the ant farmers and the Russians.

Jim Herriott and Bruce Sawhill, computer scientists in their 40s, are the ant farmers. They have worked together for 10 years—the first five at the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico and the past five at DayJet. When we met, they had a comedy-team manner, with Herriott playing the straight man, carefully explaining the principles, and Sawhill the mad scientist, exclaiming about the elegance of the underlying math. Their job has been to determine exactly how many people might pay to use an air taxi, and where they would want to go. Their answers have come through ant farming, which could less colorfully be called inductive reasoning.

For instance, to predict how many Floridians would pay to fly from Pensacola to Naples, they start not by gathering gross-travel or population figures but by trying to simulate the decisions that hundreds of thousands of individual travelers will make. Their computer models resemble a much more complex version of an "artificial life" computerized game like SimCity or SimLife—or, to explain the nickname they gave themselves, programs that simulate the paths a colony of ants will take across a floor as they discover and retrieve pieces of food. This process is also known as "agent-based modeling." The ants, or agents, in DayJet's model are the 500,000 people per day in the seven southeastern states who take business trips of 100 miles or more. Some 80 percent of these trips are now made by car. Commercial airlines account for most of the rest, with trains, buses, charter flights, etc. making up the remainder. (In the Northeast, commercial airlines represent less of the total, and trains more.)

As you step up to the counter, a trapdoor-like device measures your weight. A minute or two later, you walk out to the plane, and a minute or two after you're seated, it taxis and takes off.

Herriott and Sawhill have developed a model to simulate the individual decisions that go into every one of these business trips. The model starts with the likelihood that a person in any one city, let's say Mobile, will want to go to another, say Savannah, on any given weekday (for now, DayJet is a weekday-only service). These predictions are based on average income in each city, business relations, and other factors, and are constantly tuned to reflect real data. "It's like the pull between two planetary bodies," Herriott said. "Almost a Newtonian law!" (He was joking.)

The DayJet model factors in all relevant variables that could affect the traveler's decision—something that is hard enough for a real person in real time. It contains up-to-date listings of all flights offered by all commercial airlines serving the region, and the prices for short-term bookings and seven- or 14-day advance-purchase fares. It has average highway-speed and congestion data for the routes people would drive between any two cities, and real-world travel time from different parts of a city to the nearest airport. It includes lodging and restaurant costs, if a driving trip means an overnight stay, and rental-car and gas rates.

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Also, crucially, it tries to place some value on people's *time*. Time value obviously varies: being three hours late for a wedding is different from being three hours late for a meeting on a Thursday afternoon. Because its target customers are business travelers earning from $75,000 to several hundred thousand dollars a year, income levels at which the time savings are worth the cost, the model uses salary to approximate the business value of time. (People making even more, it assumes, might use "normal" corporate jets.)

With this information and more plugged in, the ant farmers run the model—over and over and over. While we watched on a big-screen map projection from Herriott's computer, the whole possible range of trips taken by one typical day's 500,000 business travelers whizzed by in a few minutes: Miami-Atlanta, Key West–Jacksonville, Savannah-Biloxi. The point was not to predict exactly which trips travelers would take on any particular day but instead to see which patterns of travel emerged and where there might be a market for air taxis. In theory, DayJet could offer service from any airport to any other airport within the plane's 650-mile nonstop range. But to minimize the number of empty "deadhead" legs its planes might have to fly back from remote locations and to maximize the number of paying flights each plane could make per day, the company planned to start in a concentrated area and then expand as it became sure there was more demand.

For every simulated trip, the computer was comparing all the alternatives—take the whole trip by car, take a train if there was one, drive to the nearest major airport and take Delta or JetBlue—and predicting whether a traveler would choose any of them over a possible flight with DayJet. A counter continuously tallied how many trips would be made using each option. For people taking one of the "trunk routes," like Atlanta to Miami, the airlines were the obvious choice. But enough people heading from one small place to another created a market DayJet could tap.

"We're not really going up against the airlines," Herriott said. "Where there's good air service, we want to stay out of the way. Our sweet spot is the trip of 300 or 400 miles where the air travel is so complicated or inconvenient that you finally throw up your hands and say, 'I'll just drive!' We can beat driving, especially with time and lodging costs."

During the years of waiting for Eclipse, the ant farmers ran and refined their models and DayJet refined its idea of where it would start offering service. The analytic process underscored, for instance, the importance of including Tallahassee in the list of cities it would fly to and from. Like all state capitals, Tallahassee generates lots of business travel—and like many others (Sacramento, Springfield, Albany, Salem), it is in an out-of-the-way location with bad and expensive airline connections.

DayJet noticed that a shift in airline policy was helping it. As airlines "upgraded" the equipment they used for small cities—sleek-looking 50-seat regional jets in place of clunky 13-seat turboprops—many of them had to downgrade their service. This shift was bad news for small cities in many ways. For instance, Lakeland, where I went on my DayJet flight, had with federal and state funding built a new $6.8 million terminal in 2002. The investment was based on the assumption that a feeder airline would add Lakeland to its schedule—probably Comair, a Delta subsidiary, which had served Lakeland with small planes in the 1980s. In fact, no airlines came, and the expensive terminal stood empty—until the first Dayjet flight arrived last October. Cities that could keep small turboprops full might generate too little traffic for larger regional jets, but plenty to sustain an air-taxi business.

Herriott and Sawhill emphasized that the market for business travel had a "long tail" pattern, much like book sales on Amazon. A few main trunk routes, say New York–Miami, and the familiar handful of major airports account for most commercial airline traffic, just as a few *Harry Potter*–style blockbusters outsell anything else. But most business trips are from one obscure destination to another, just as books most people have never heard of together account for most Amazon sales.

By the time DayJet got its first airplanes from Eclipse last year, it had an idea of where it would find its initial market. By March, it was serving 60 cities in the Southeast. Trips had to start, end, or pass through one of 10 "DayPort" cities, as in the familiar airline "hub and spoke" model. The difference is that the company is expanding the number of these "hubs" every month, building toward a network that won't cover every possible city pair but will cover a lot. By the end of this year, DayJet expects to cover 100 cities in six states, 30 or so of them hubs. Its map of planned expansion, pushing steadily northward from Florida, reminded me of Cold War–era posters about the potential spread of Communist influence.

While the ant farmers tried to determine where the company should start its service, the mathematicians from Russia were devising the software on which the company would run. In the end, they came up with plans that, in their view, made DayJet conceptually closer to Google or eBay than to existing airline companies. Before I explain what I heard from Alex Khmelnitsky, a note: most of the time I spend reporting, I spend listening to people describe what they do. It's the payoff of the job—and through years of transcribing notes, I've learned that the typical minute or two or 10 of conversation boils down to a sentence or so of usable thought.

Not so with Alex! He and his colleague Eugene Taits worked for Iacobucci at Citrix and joined DayJet in its early days; another Russian veteran of Citrix, Oleg Kuzedub,

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joined DayJet recently. During the hour I spent with Alex and Oleg (Taits was out of town), Oleg said only a few words. But Alex more than made up—and I have never listened so hard trying to comprehend.

To spare readers, not to mention myself, undue exertion, I'll simply say that in the view of everyone I spoke with at the company, the Russian-designed mathematical backbone of the company was its crucial advantage over any competitors, and would mean the difference between the company's making a profit and not.

The part of the system customers notice is DayJet's unusual way of setting prices. When you want to travel, you go to its Web site, dayjet.com. You can register, at no charge, and receive price quotes for sample trips. If you'd actually like to travel, you and your company must be approved as DayJet "members," which largely involves submitting your name to the Transportation Security Administration for security vetting. The concept here is similar to the "trusted traveler" program the TSA is introducing for commercial air travel, and to El Al's famed security. The emphasis is on knowing who is traveling rather than on scrutinizing people each time they board a plane. Once approved by the TSA, passengers won't have to be searched before each flight. Like passengers on most of today's charter jets or small private planes, they will simply walk into a terminal, identify themselves with a driver's license or similar document, and go out to the airplane. Even if the TSA insisted on formal screening for each DayJet passenger, in practice that would mean only a small delay, because no more than three passengers will board each DayJet plane. Avoiding long security lines is one of many steps toward in-and-out speed of the kind previously enjoyed only by corporate moguls on private jets. Six minutes after Bruce Holmes and I got out of the car at the Boca Raton airport, we were getting on the plane.

On the Web site, you say where you'd like to go—to Naples, from Tallahassee—and when. Then comes the crucial part: specifying how flexible you are about your travel plans. If the flight itself takes just under two hours versus seven hours of driving (the site tells you how long the flight will take), and you have exactly two hours in which you'd like to travel, you say: "Can't leave till 2 p.m., must arrive at 4 p.m." After only a few seconds, the system gives you a quote, in this case DayJet's highest rate: $1,296. But if you are free to travel any time that day as long as you get there by dinnertime, you enter: "Could leave as early as 11 a.m. but must arrive by 6 p.m." In that case, the system comes back with a quote about one-quarter as high: $346. Airline fares for this route on Orbitz or Travelocity are usually higher, and the trip always takes longer, because there are no nonstops.

If you accept, the trip is booked—and the night before your trip, you get an e-mail specifying your exact departure time, meaning you won't have to devote your entire "travel window" to traveling. If the e-mail says to get to the airport by 3 p.m., the plane will be there waiting for you. All you do at the airport is show your ID at a counter and walk onto the plane. If you have specified a wide-enough travel window to get a lower price, there may be at most one intermediate stop to drop off or pick up another passenger. Combining trips this way, in a familiar SuperShuttle model, is the key to DayJet's per-seat, on-demand service, which keeps prices well below what they would be for chartering an entire plane.

In the few seconds it takes DayJet to price your trip, a system called RTR (for "real-time routing") is figuring out how your request will affect the placement of planes, pilots, and passengers for all other flights that day, and exactly how much the company must charge to make a profit on your flight. The mechanics of making all of this work are what have made the Russians famous within the company—along with a vast computing system called ASTRO, which runs round the clock, constantly looking for more efficient ways to combine planes, pilots, and the time windows requested by passengers.

Between 6 and 7 p.m. each evening, the computers "gelatinize" the assignments for the next day—make them firm enough to tell passengers exactly when to show up at the airports, but still pliable enough that pilots and planes might be reassigned if last-minute requests come in. From the passenger's point of view, everything is truly set by this point. (Passengers can change or cancel their flights until 6 p.m. the previous night, for a $100 fee. Between 6 p.m. and two hours before flight time, the cancellation fee is 50 percent of the fare. Within two hours of flight time, passengers who cancel must forfeit the full fare.) But until an hour or two before each flight, the company may not be sure which airplane, with which team of pilots from which other destination, will be making the trip. These last-minute assignments are left to ASTRO, which keeps track of the unbelievably intricate technical, legal, and

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The wedge sank five times into the clay,
and a word, which had been spoken in a breath,
lay still until the gods' names were forgotten.
Then, when strangers took the tile in hand,
while stars sailed into the dark
beyond the world, the dead tongue
in the clay began to speak.

—BROOKS HAXTON

Brooks Haxton's new collection of poems, *They Lift Their Wings to Cry*, will be published in June. He teaches at Syracuse University.

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human variables required to meet the promised schedule. (For instance: not simply which pilots are due for rest time but also which pilots weigh how much, so that two fat ones won't lead to an overloaded flight.)

I told Brad Noe, the vice president for software development, that the only place I had seen something similar was in a logistics center tracking the flow of electronic products from factories in China, through U.S. air couriers, to delivery in the United States. "This is a logistics company," he replied, "that happens to be moving people."

What is the resulting experience like, if you care mainly about getting somewhere rather than marveling at the software? I am an enthusiast, as just possibly might be clear. But objectively, this is a comfortable and convenient way to travel.

You go to the airport, which, because it's small, is less congested than ones you're used to. You walk to the DayJet counter, which resembles a rental-car booth. There's probably no line, because probably no one else is going at just this time. As you step up to the counter, a trapdoor-like device measures your actual weight while the attendant asks to weigh your bags. (On small airplanes this is important, for instance in determining where to place the bags.) A minute or two later, you walk out to the plane, and a minute or two after you're seated, it taxis and takes off.

Decades ago, while working for Jimmy Carter, I was struck by one underpublicized detail about Air Force One: practically as soon as the president sat down, the plane started to move. It's not quite as fast with these small jets, but eliminating the waste time of the airline experience—the hour or two you must be at the airport before the plane actually starts taxiing, the 10 to 15 minutes or more between taxi and takeoff—makes a big difference in overall travel speed. It's the same at the other end. Two minutes after the wheels touched the tarmac on my DayJet flight to Lakeland, I was standing in the terminal.

The plane feels roomy rather than cramped inside, certainly compared with a jammed airliner. The cabin is quiet enough that you can talk in a normal voice—though by the end of my return trip, I noticed enough of a whine to want to bring a noise-canceling headset the next time I travel. (To be fair, I also wear these on airliners.) It was bumpy going through a layer of clouds on descent, but those clouds would have been bumpy in any airplane. And the view was great.

So what could be wrong with this model? The main obstacles to the company's success, and to the whole industry's growth, are several. I'll start with something that surprisingly is not a problem: aerial congestion. America's aviation system is like a big, wide freeway, with most cars jammed up at a few exits. The only crowded parts of today's system—the runways and approach paths to the big hub airports—are precisely the places air taxis plan never to go. The DayJet planes fly at altitudes basically unused by other aircraft, 15,000 to 25,000 feet. (Very small planes fly lower than that; airliners and corporate jets fly higher.) "What's the biggest airport we'll ever go into?" Traver Gruen-Kennedy, the company's vice president for strategic operations, said to me. "A place like Savannah or Knoxville. Where the airlines are is where we don't want to be."

The worst news for passengers who live in areas plagued by congestion is what it means for air-taxi expansion plans. As DayJet continues adding a few more cities each month, it is considering whether to keep expanding from its existing network—or to start up in another part of the country, perhaps California or the Midwest. "I can tell you the one part of the country we're not crazy about," John Staten said. "That's the Northeast"—where everything is already congested, and where railroads provide an option that doesn't exist elsewhere.

The environment? A more serious concern, since a plane carrying one to three passengers obviously uses more fuel per person than one carrying 150, if all seats are full. Bruce Holmes's response is that most of DayJet's customers would otherwise have driven, probably alone and in a large car—and the new jets are designed to beat or match such trips in fuel consumption and overall carbon output per passenger mile. That's not saying much, of course, and the company is part of an alliance to develop much more efficient engines, alternative fuel sources, and other technologies known as "NextGen" to make flights more efficient and less polluting. (Noise has not been a complaint so far, since DayJet's engines are substantially quieter than those on airlines or most business jets.) DayJet's business models assume that oil will never be cheap again; its projections for costs and prices are based on oil that costs between $90 and $120 per barrel.

And there are the other perils that can affect any start-up, especially in a field with the life-and-death risks of aviation. Maybe the Eclipse airplanes will prove to have some flaw. (In part for this reason, DayJet has always intended to add other kinds of jets to its fleet as they come on the market. The next promising one is from Honda.) Maybe there will be a crash or a terrorist threat. Maybe as the company triples its workforce within a year, it will have trouble maintaining its can-do culture. Maybe something else will go wrong.

But that DayJet has come so far is startling. Or at least to me. Having interviewed Bruce Holmes more than a decade ago about his vision of an air-taxi jet fleet, I asked him as we got off the plane what had surprised him.

"You know ... nothing!" he said, after a pause, seeming surprised to have come to that conclusion. "It's just what we foresaw."

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Al Franken's political future—and maybe Democratic dominance of the Senate—depends on his ability to keep a (mostly) straight face between now and November.

BY JOSHUA GREEN

Photograph by Steve Pyke

He's Not Joking

Late one Friday night in February, exactly one year to the day after embarking on an unlikely campaign for the U.S. Senate, Al Franken is lying on the floor of his Minneapolis townhouse, moaning. The detritus of a long evening is spread out around him: the video camera, lighting equipment, and MacBook used to create the funny fund-raising video he has just finished shooting. The entourage of disheveled, tech-savvy 20-somethings who staff his campaign are splayed across couches and chairs. There are piles of FRANKEN FOR SENATE buttons and bumper stickers, and a flattened pink box of Franken Berry breakfast cereal that was briefly considered as a prop but »

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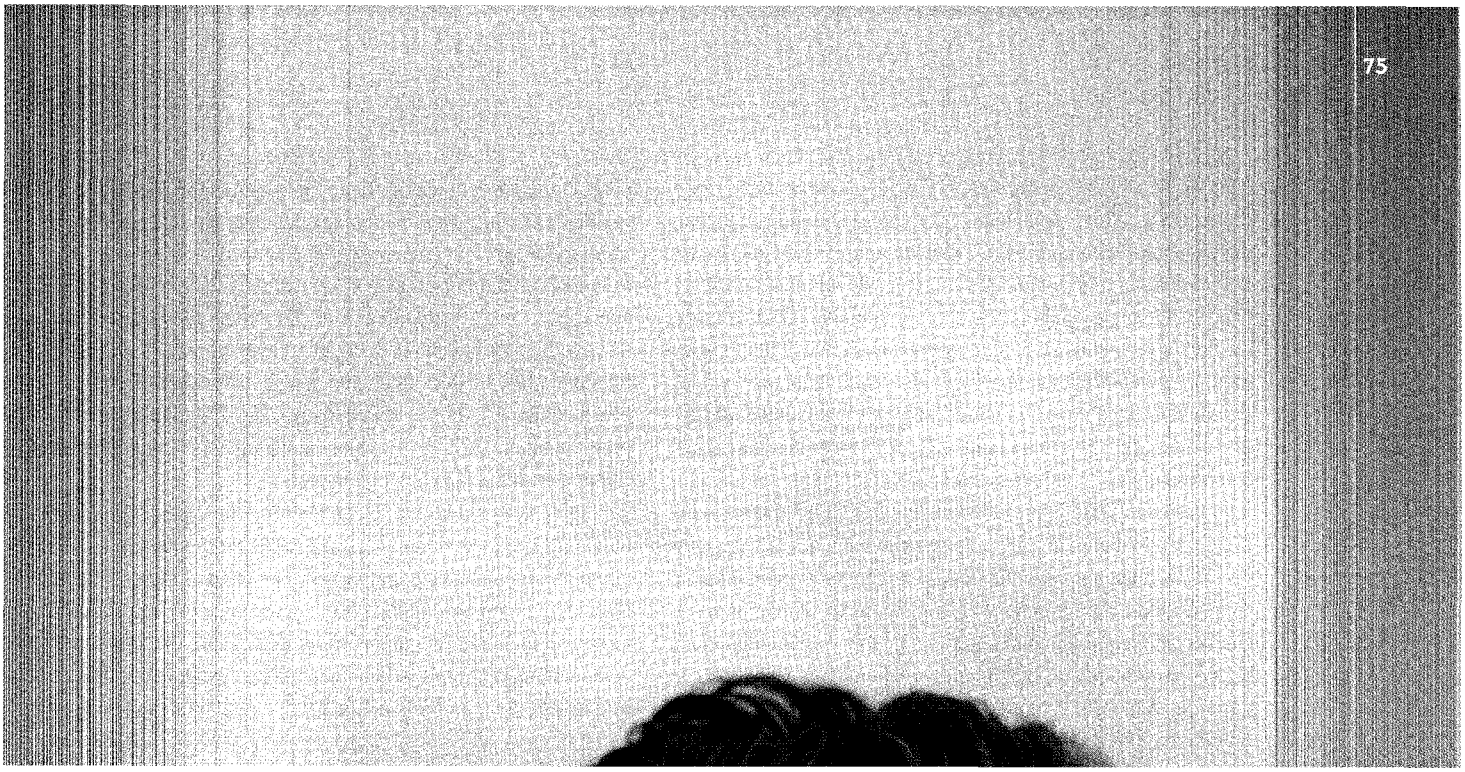

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rejected, to Franken's evident disappointment. He once did a skit on *Saturday Night Live* that involved his threatening to sue the makers of the monster-themed sugar cereal for appropriating his name and likeness. (Indeed, the Franken Berry monster bears a striking resemblance to the 56-year-old comedian: same wide face, broad goofy grin, and owlish eyes. Franken insists, furthermore, that the twin lumps atop the monster's head are a virtual replica of his rear end.) But running for the Senate is serious business, so the monster had to go.

Until now, the evening has afforded Candidate Al the rare luxury of goofing off as Comedian Al. A practice runthrough of the script's "hard ask" for money prompted a raised hand and a query: "What's my motivation?" Where the script encouraged viewers to grab a bumper sticker, Franken deadpanned, "Remember—if you put one on your car, don't cut anyone off." A brief debate ensued over whether buttons, too, should feature in the video, until Franken's professional dignity asserted itself. "I don't want this to be a prop act," he protested, and added, with a grin, "I'm not Carrot Top."

The video now in the can, Franken's fun has ended. He is on the floor moaning because he's dreading what comes next. Beneath the Franken Berry box lies a manila folder containing the biographies and phone numbers of dozens of local luminaries he must call or write before turning in for the night. This is the unglamorous, unfunny reality of running for public office that has consumed much of his past year—the endless series of bean feeds, spaghetti dinners, precinct meetings, obscure county fairs, and phone calls that constitute true political organizing. It's why so many celebrities who muse about running for this or that rarely follow through. But tonight, as he does practically every night, Franken eventually picks himself up, plops himself down at the dining-room table, and reaches for the phone.

No candidate this year has attracted anything like the curiosity Al Franken has, because no one quite like him has ever seriously pursued high office. (Jesse Ventura, the pro wrestler elected governor of Minnesota 10 years ago, essentially ran on a lark.) His career as a satirist—as a writer and performer on *Saturday Night Live*, as the author of best-selling polemics like *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations*, as the voice of the liberal radio network Air America—is famously outrageous, and promises to be both boon and burden to his political career. "When I first heard he was running," says Lawrence Jacobs, a political scientist at the University of Minnesota, "I thought it was a book project." That's a fair supposition. Franken wrote a satirical novel, *Why Not Me?*, in which he ran for president on a single-issue platform—eliminating ATM fees—and won.

But as reports of Franken's doings began filtering in from around the state, Jacobs and other skeptics began to realize they were wrong. Over the past year, Franken has quietly built a grassroots organization that helped him raise more money than any other challenger in the country and erase what began as a 22-point deficit to the Republican incumbent, Norm Coleman. Franken was considered a long shot for his party's nomination. But by January, he had not only pulled well ahead of his Democratic rivals but had nosed ahead of Coleman, too. Here's the punch line: he did it not through his comedy but through old-fashioned shoe-leather politicking.

Coleman may be the Senate's most vulnerable incumbent. He was narrowly elected in 2002 in a state that has since swung decidedly to the left. For many Democrats in Minnesota and across the country, the race has poignancy, because Coleman's seat belonged to Paul Wellstone, a liberal icon who was killed in a plane crash a few weeks before the 2002 election. Franken and Wellstone were close friends, so along with the political factors, a powerful emotional element is at work.

Yet Franken was far from the establishment choice to challenge Coleman, and his success has caused consternation among some Democrats in Washington. (On the day he announced, the Republican state party distributed a press release highlighting his contention that "Republican politicians are shameless dicks.") Franken's comedic career has brought him fame and connections that are valuable: Hollywood has provided an important source of campaign money. But it has also produced a trove of controversial jokes and statements that Republicans assume will make him an easy target if, as expected, he wins the Democratic nomination on June 7. No matter what happens, Minnesota's Senate race should be a spectacle like few others—with potentially important effects.

Franken's significance to Democrats stems not just from the opportunity to gain a seat in the Senate. Minnesota is a crucial swing state in the presidential race, and its governor, Tim Pawlenty, is a likely choice to become John McCain's running mate. So a strong Democratic Senate candidate is a necessary bulwark. If November's elections are anything like the wave that swept Democrats into office in 2006, the party will stand not only to regain the presidency but also possibly to win a veto-proof majority in the Senate. For that to happen, however, it will almost certainly need to carry Minnesota. So for Democrats, an awful lot is riding on Al Franken and the open question of whether a funny guy can play the straight man.

The next morning, I returned to the townhouse to meet Franken for a day on the campaign trail. Out front waiting for me was his campaign manager, Andy Barr, a 24-year-old who began researching and writing for him as a Harvard undergraduate, and his driver, Brian Heenan, a student volunteer Franken has nicknamed "Gums" for reasons no one can quite remember.

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Barr went upstairs to rouse the candidate, leaving Gums and me to browse the pictures of Franken's two grown kids, Joe and Thomasin, and the hundreds of political and history titles crammed onto bookshelves and stacked in piles throughout the unprepossessing house. Franken is thought of almost exclusively as a comedian and satirist, but he is a ferocious policy wonk as well. (He is good friends with Norm Ornstein, a professionally certified wonk at the American Enterprise Institute.) *The O'Franken Factor*, the Air America show he left to run for the Senate, was known for its high-spirited skewering of Republicans. But amid the Bush-bashing and O'Reilly-baiting, it often featured serious authors and experts on everything from Iraq to Social Security to Medicare.

"Gums!" Franken exclaimed when he bounded down the stairs a little while later. "You're wearing a tie. You're the best-dressed campaign worker I've ever seen." Gums accepted the ribbing with the pleased, awkward smile I came to recognize as part of a running dialogue between the two.

After a rundown of the day's schedule and a short game of find-Al's-missing-cell-phone, Team Franken piled into the campaign's hybrid SUV and left me to retrieve my rental car. To project a more senatorial air, Franken is trying hard to watch what he says, and his staff has placed him in a kind of protective custody: journalists are not allowed to ride along, as is standard campaign practice, lest they overhear and report an undignified remark. So I spent most of my day chasing Gums across Minnesota.

Our first stop was the St. Paul headquarters of ACORN, an advocacy group for low- and moderate-income families, where a handful of volunteers, reporters, and the three Democratic Senate hopefuls were squeezed into the tiny walk-up offices for what was billed as a press conference. Franken's rivals were Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, a tall, retiring professor from nearby University of St. Thomas, and Mike Ciresi, a small, dapper, and very rich partner in a large Minneapolis law firm (who dropped out of the race several weeks later). The candidates were invited to deliver short speeches. Franken got right to the point about what he wants to do in Washington: help bring about universal health care, climate-change legislation, "energy independence," and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Though his rivals delivered similar party-line remarks, it didn't take long to see why he tends to outshine them. A practiced improviser, Franken spotted an official from the Children's Defense Fund. "I notice you're not using your old slogan, 'Leave No Child Behind,'" he said, drawing chuckles. "Maybe that's been besmirched in some way?" Before long, the center of gravity in the room had shifted palpably toward Franken.

Much of the energy behind Franken's campaign comes from his broad and enthusiastic support among young voters. We arrived next at the Minnesota Young DFL convention, an annual gathering of the state's young Democrats (the state party is known as the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party) being held in a giant union hall on the outskirts of St. Paul, which was to culminate in a straw poll. (Franken won easily.) If Franken was not exactly mobbed by well-wishers when he walked in the door, that was because so many of the state's young Democrats had already met him, and many were volunteering for the campaign. Instead he was greeted by a steady stream of college students, in pairs or small groups, many of whom he knew by name. When his turn came to address the audience, Franken jogged to the front of the room, took the microphone, and began by quoting Wellstone: "The future belongs to those who are passionate and work hard."

Franken seeks not to unite Republicans and Democrats but to draw sharp contrasts, in a style of chesty confrontation.

Franken's speeches typically combine three elements: knocking Bush and Coleman, reciting the standard Democratic litany, and attempting to inspire a movement. "Many of you were 11 years old when George Bush was elected," he told the crowd. "You don't remember having a president who was articulate or that the federal government can actually work with. You don't remember when America was respected in the world." This drew laughter and cheering, though Franken did not look like he was joking. He spoke about his wife of 32 years, Franni, and how after her father died, when she was an infant, her mother worked and also relied on Social Security and Pell grants to raise and educate five children. "Conservatives always talk about pulling yourself up by the bootstraps," he said. "Well, first you need the boots. I think the government's job is to give people the boots." He segued into the need for universal health care, energy independence, and withdrawal from Iraq, and then pivoted, importuning the crowd to rise up and join him, using language drawn from other recent insurgents including Barack Obama and Howard Dean: "This is an amazing time, this is our time, and we can do it. We're a people-powered machine. This is gonna be a fun race. We're going to take Norm Coleman

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down. I will beat him ... We are building a movement, and we're going to change America."

Though his talk of change and building a movement echoes Obama's, Franken's appeal is altogether different. He doesn't seek to unite Republicans and Democrats, as Obama does, but rather to draw sharp contrasts, as Dean did, in a style of chesty confrontation. I watched the speech with a young Navy officer and Iraq veteran named Tim Wellman Jr., who was wearing the military equivalent of a letterman's jacket, embroidered with his dates of service and where he'd deployed, with a couple of Franken stickers slapped on. Though it doesn't get nearly the attention his political activism does, Franken was participating in USO tours long before it was fashionable among Democrats, and has kept it up with trips to Iraq and Afghanistan, despite his opposition to the war (though he did not initially oppose it). I asked Wellman what drew him to Franken. "He brings a clear vision of right and wrong," he said. "He's been very strong about confronting Republicans on their own issues, like strength and war." Other Democrats in the audience said much the same thing.

Among other things, the 2008 election will test Franken's political worldview—and that view, if it proves to be correct, could sweep him and many other Democrats into office. Toward the back of the room, looking slightly older than the rest of the crowd, Brian Melendez, the state Democratic chairman, was abuzz about the Minnesota presidential caucuses that had taken place a week earlier. He outlined their importance to the fall election. "The largest turnout we've ever had in a Democratic caucus," he told me, "was about 75,000 or 80,000 people in 1968, when two home-state favorites, Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy, were on the ballot. Last week, we had 213,000 people turn out, and the Republicans had about 70,000." A similar turnout in November would certainly bode well for Franken.

Minnesota's Democratic nominee will eventually be decided at the state convention after a rolling series of caucuses much like the presidential caucuses in Iowa—only infinitely more complicated and dragged out across many months. Our two-car caravan pressed onward to Isanti County, an hour north of Minneapolis, hoping to arrive in time to participate in this curious ritual.

The crowd in the community center for what officially was a "walking sub-caucus" couldn't have looked more different from the one we'd just left. About 200 residents, most of them working-class and many of them elderly, mingled with the three candidates and their staffs in a giant scrum. Franken's long days on the trail have helped him with this audience. He has won the endorsement of 13 labor unions, from the United Auto Workers to the teachers' union. Franken pinballed from voter to voter, trying to make the sell. The precinct captain announced that voters had 10 minutes to assemble themselves behind a candidate. Then he would "freeze the floor," as in a game of musical chairs, and record the tally. Campaign staffers tore around the room herding and enticing supporters, occasionally leaping up on chairs and looking around for a quick count in a way that made them resemble prairie dogs.

If Franken employs a campaign worker who looks old enough to have gone through this process before, I didn't meet one. But some of his staffers, anticipating the confusion the caucus process creates, had made a step-by-step instructional video on how to caucus and posted it on YouTube for both young voters and other volunteers. The lessons seemed to pay off. Franken won an easy plurality and walked away with the most pledged delegates—another small step closer to the nomination. As the sun began to set, Gums pulled the SUV around and we all set off on a celebratory quest for Franken's favorite dessert, raspberry pie.

Franken has become a good enough campaigner that it's easy to lose sight of just how audacious a move he's trying to make. A little more than a year ago, he was playing radio characters like "Liam the Loose-Boweled Leprechaun"; a year hence, he could be a sitting U.S. senator. It's enough to make Bill O'Reilly's head explode. But Franken doesn't see it this way. "A satirist looks at a situation and sees the inconsistencies and hypocrisies, and he cuts through the baloney and gets to the truth," he often says when confronted by skeptics. "I think that's pretty good training for the Senate, don't you?"

After pie in a roadside restaurant, we talked about his political aspirations. It became clear that what most of mankind views as a giant leap Franken regards as a small step, the logical progression of his life's work. His political activism has long coexisted with his comedy career, at times uneasily. He was raised in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park by a moderate-Republican father who was a card-carrying member of the NAACP. Franken says he got interested in politics at age 12 or 13, during the civil-rights movement. "We'd watch the news after dinner," he told me, "and my dad would point to the TV when they were putting hoses on demonstrators in the South, and he'd say, 'That's wrong. No Jew can be for that.'" When Barry Goldwater voted against the Civil Rights Act, Franken's father became a Democrat.

Al Franken, too, became a Democrat, though one whose defining experiences came a bit later. "When I started doing satire in high school, a lot of it was about Vietnam and Nixon," he said. His first big success at *Saturday Night Live* was a Nixon's-final-days sketch during the show's inaugural season. (Franken's fixation remains intact: a "Nixon bathroom" in his Minneapolis townhouse is covered with Nixon memorabilia, including a letter to Franken declining an invitation to appear on *Saturday Night Live*.)

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Though he says he has always been engaged, Franken's political activism was not nearly as visible then as it is now. "At *SNL* we never felt like we had a political ax to grind," he said. "We felt the show shouldn't have just one political viewpoint." He jumped from satirizing politics to participating in it when he stumped for Wellstone's first Senate race, in 1990. Franken does modify his humor when the occasion demands it: his lines on the campaign trail and for the troops on USO tours generally lack the political barbs he's famous for ("I've had five MREs so far, and none of them has developed an exit strategy"). But he is far better-known for his outspokenness.

Franken's departure from *SNL*, in 1995, coincided with the Republican ascendance in Washington. He recalls taking tremendous offense at the effort to unwind the social safety net that had rescued his wife's family, among others, and he found an outlet in book writing. "I was trying to take on these guys, and no one else was doing it."

One oddity about Franken is that he views the form of his involvement in politics—satire—as almost incidental to the fact that he is so involved, and believes that the importance of his best-selling books is not that they made him more rich and famous but that they sounded a clarion at a time when the Democratic Party was foundering. "I think a large part of being a leader is speaking out," he told me, "and I think I have a way of framing and talking about things that is persuasive and makes people understand them and the stakes. So when I talk about this new progressive movement, I see myself as having been one of the leaders of this for quite a while with my books, with my radio show, and now as a candidate. Being someone who's out front leading the charge is something I've been doing for a long time."

This is not a widely held view of Franken. I think the uneasy dissonance that often seems to surround him in the media and even on the campaign trail stems from the fact that most people, especially reporters, know him purely through his comedy, and are not always prepared to recognize the man in full. The bleeding-heart sincerity and conviction that can move him to tears on the campaign trail when he is speaking about wounded soldiers or ailing citizens are unexpected attributes (and therefore hard to process) in a comedian—especially one who delights in silliness as much as Franken does.

In the past, this sincerity has often taken the form of aggressive, and occasionally reckless, behavior. At the 2003 BookExpo America convention in Los Angeles, Franken appeared on a panel with Bill O'Reilly to promote his book *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, whose cover art included O'Reilly's angry mug. Franken hijacked the discussion and turned it into a brutally personal attack on O'Reilly that was broadcast nationally on C-SPAN. The unexpectedness of the assault (at a book fair!), and Franken's sheer ferocity, were unsettling. The following year, he went further. At a rally in Manchester, New Hampshire, on the eve of the Democratic primary, a heckler disrupted Howard Dean. Franken, a former high-school wrestler, was standing nearby and took matters into his own hands, lunging at the man and pulling him down by the knees in front of a startled national press corps. Rather than let it go, Franken engaged in prolonged bickering with several right-leaning media outlets over how the incident was portrayed.

Like the O'Reilly showdown, disposing of the heckler amplified Franken's political celebrity by another order of magnitude and cemented his status as a hero to the disaffected left. For many Minnesotans I spoke with on the campaign trail, this remains a large part of his appeal. But if he wins the Democratic nomination, his short fuse will become a liability. It is already shaping up to be the Republicans' main line of attack.

Franken professes to understand this. "The first day I announced, they had a press conference calling me angry," he told me. "It hasn't changed much: angry, negative, name-calling, that I'm a Hollywood elitist. And then there's just a lot of taking my jokes out of context and putting them through the 'de-humorizer.' It's a machine they've developed." He lets out a big laugh.

But the matter is far from settled. "There are some pretty interesting questions about the nature of the fit," Lawrence Jacobs, the University of Minnesota professor, says. "He has a way about him that's kind of brash and slightly out of control. You can say that Ventura and Wellstone had that makeup in certain respects. But it was less about them personally, and they were able to project that as a political message. With Franken, a lot of that brashness, it's almost as if he needs to be the center of attention."

And, of course, he always has been. The common thread running through Franken's various career incarnations—comedian, author, radio personality—is that each has rewarded the impulsive, unbridled responses that are his signature talent. He is funny, smart, and quick-witted, and probably would not have succeeded to the degree he has if he possessed the instinctive caution and self-control that all good politicians eventually must develop.

If Franken makes it to the Senate, he'll likely inherit the role that once belonged to his friend Paul Wellstone: the outspoken conscience of his party, who keeps pushing even when everybody else wants to give up. It's a role he's been prepping for all his life. But first he'll have to pass a big audition—one that's a bit of a cosmic joke. Even if Franken's outrageous antics and heartfelt activist passion have gotten him this far, his fate in November very likely rests on whether, in the face of inevitable attacks, he can contain them.

Joshua Green is an *Atlantic* senior editor.

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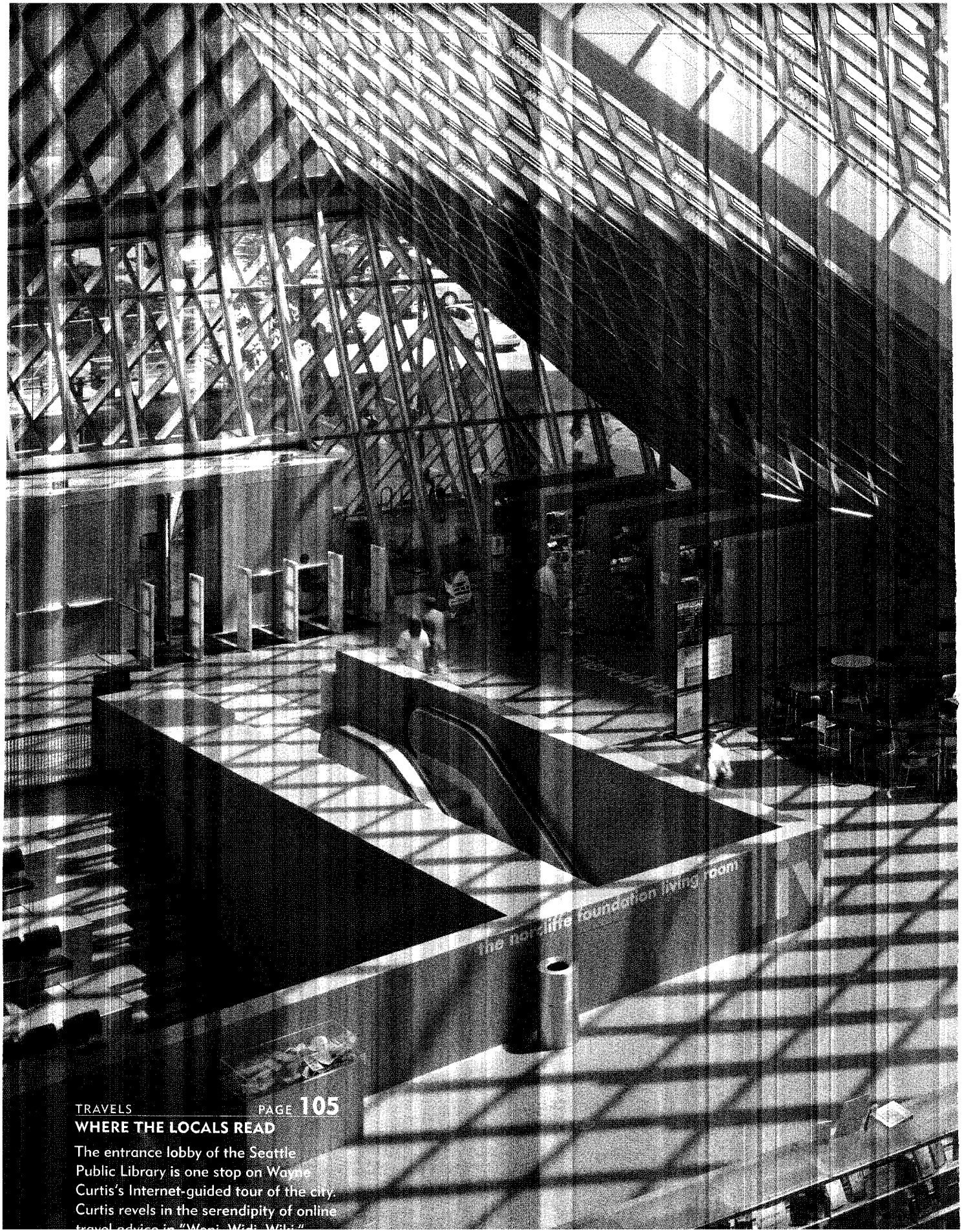

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WHERE THE LOCALS READ

The entrance lobby of the Seattle Public Library is one stop on Wayne Curtis's Internet-guided tour of the city. Curtis revels in the serendipity of online travel advice in "Web, Wit, Wit!"

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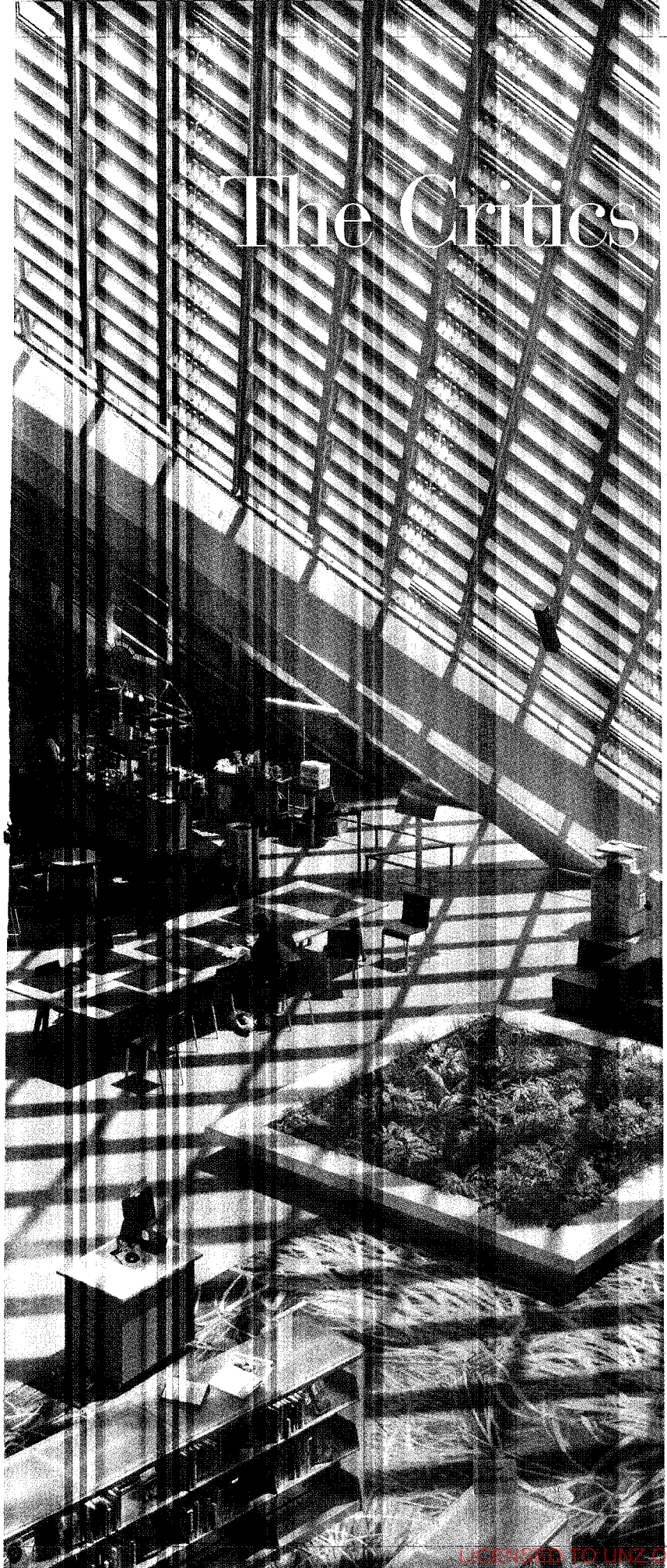

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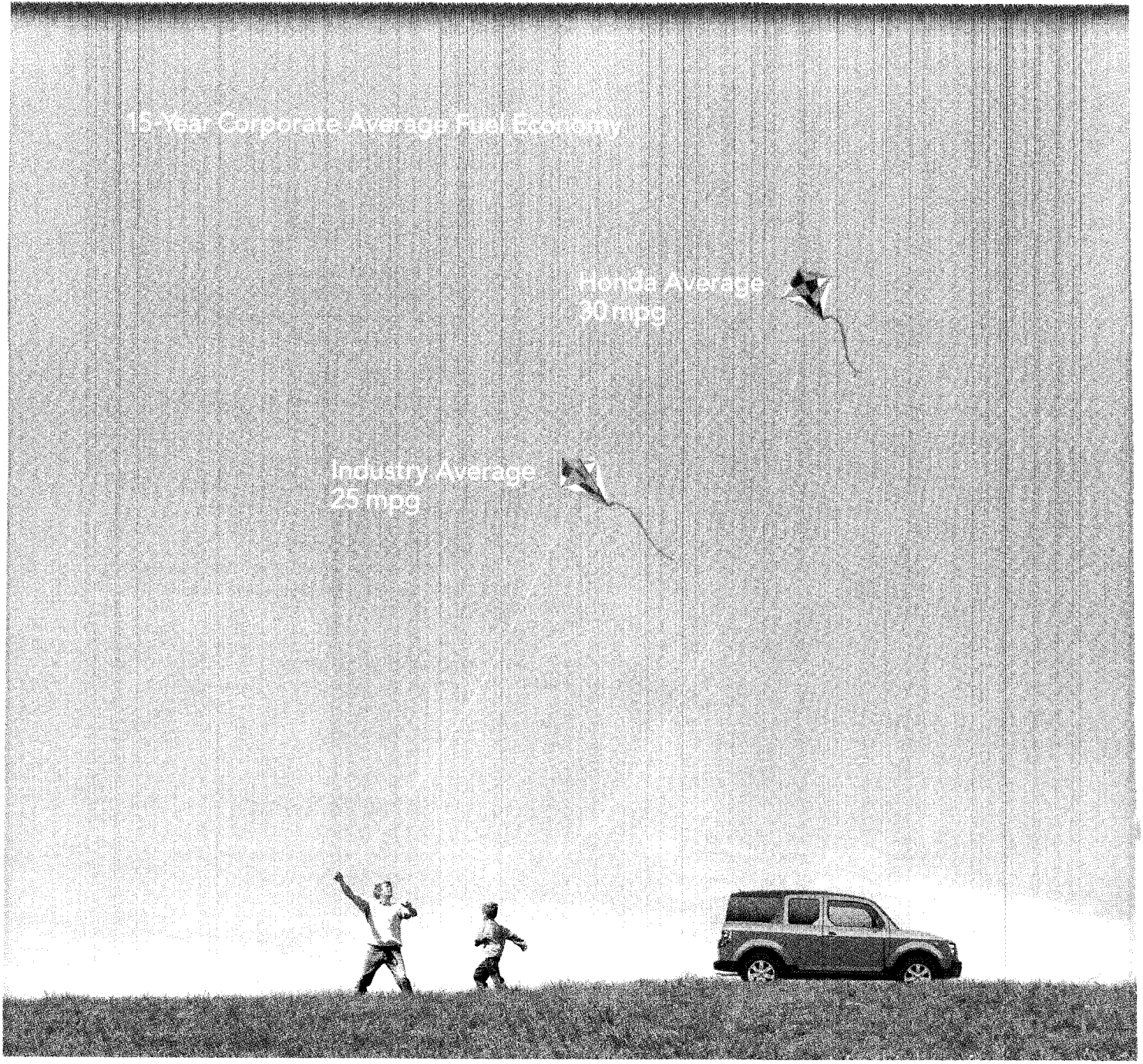

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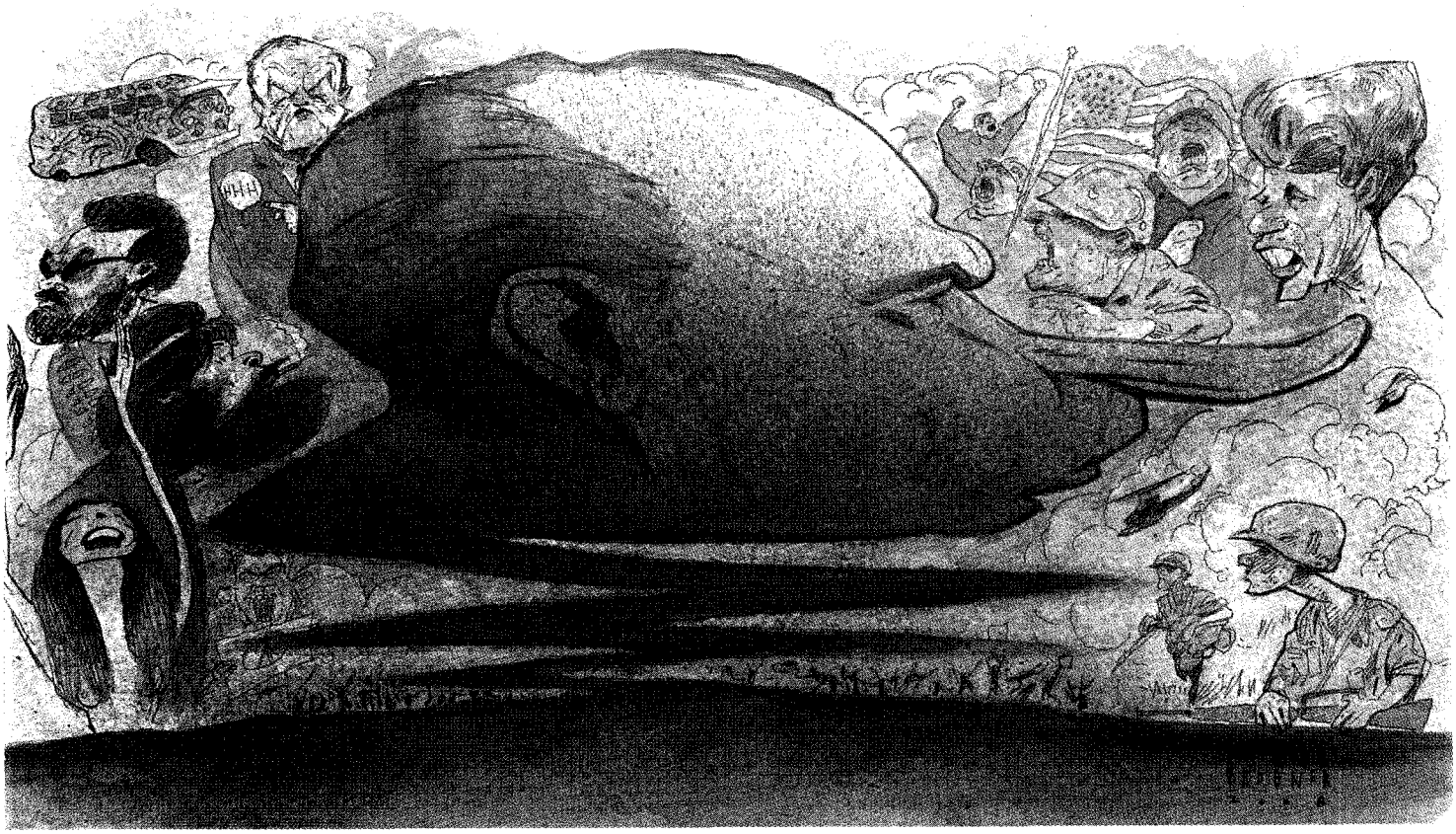


STEVE BRODNER

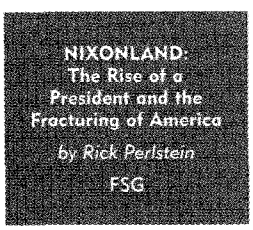
BOOKS

A sweeping new social history portrays Richard Nixon as the president his fratricidal country deserved—and perhaps the best we could have hoped for.

E Pluribus Nixon

BY ROSS DOUTHAT

Seven years ago, Rick Perlstein, a young and decidedly left-wing historian, accomplished a daring feat: he imagined his way into the hearts and minds of the right-wing idealists who made Goldwaterite conservatism one of the most successful mass movements of the 1960s. The result was *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, a richly detailed narrative of the 1964 election, and a dense and dizzying account of a moment when America was teetering on the verge of a nervous breakdown but didn't know it yet.



Now Perlstein has produced a sequel. If *Before the Storm* was a near-masterpiece, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*, which covers the turbulent years from Goldwater's defeat to Nixon's 1972 landslide victory, is merely a great success. It labors under handicaps his first book didn't have: whereas *Before the Storm* dealt with a circumscribed and neglected moment (who remembers Dr. Fred Schwarz's Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, or the presidential boomlet for William Warren Scranton?), *Nixonland* tackles the most obsessed-over era in recent American history. Any book that rolls Woodstock and Watergate, the death of RFK and the Tet Offensive, Jane Fonda and George Wallace, and a cast of thousands more into a mere 800 pages or so is bound to sprawl and sag a bit, to rush too quickly through some topics and linger too long with others.

Even so, *Nixonland* reads marvelously. Perlstein has the rare gift of being able to weave social, political, and cultural history into a single seamless

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narrative, linking backroom political negotiations to suburban protests over sex education in schools to the premiere of *Bonnie and Clyde*. And he has the eye of a great documentarian, fastening not only on the obvious historical set pieces (Kent State, Watts, Attica), but on the not-so-obvious ones as well. A National Association of Governors cruise, late in 1967, featuring George Romney "dressed like Xavier Cugat" on the dance floor, Ronald and Nancy Reagan sipping crème de menthes nearby, and Nelson Rockefeller chewing on seasickness pills and denying, yet again, that he has any designs on the presidency. A White House concert in '72 in which one of the backup singers suddenly plucked a STOP THE KILLING banner from her décolletage and told Richard Nixon, "If Jesus Christ were in this room tonight, you would not dare to drop another bomb." A McGovern fundraiser at which Simon and Garfunkel goaded the crowd to boo the patrons in the most-expensive seats, and Peter, Paul, and Mary invited everyone present to "take your place on the great mandala."

The hinge of the book is a chapter-length account of the riotous 1968 Democratic Convention, told from the vantage point of the American living room—a scene-by-scene, blow-by-blow account of what the average American might have seen if he or she had flicked on NBC at a quarter past four on the day Hubert Humphrey was nominated for president. It's the most riveting description of a television broadcast you'll ever read.

Perlstein has a documentarian's ear as well. He nails the split personality of Bobby Kennedy—the New Politics saint and the old-school political brawler—with a pair of apposite quotations, one from a *New Republic* profile that compared the young senator's political style to a hippie "happening" and gushed over his flair for "sudden, spontaneous, half-understood acts of calculated risk"; and the other from Eldridge Cleaver, who wrote of RFK:

> I had seen that face so many times before—hard, bitter, scurvy—all those things I had seen in his face on the bodies of nighttime burglars who had been in prison for at least ten years.

He sums up three decades' worth of Hollywood political activism in one tone-deaf Warren Beatty remark from 1972: "A great deal of the leadership of this generation comes from music and film people, whether people like that fact or not." He captures the essence of Richard Nixon's career in a single aside to Leonard Garment: "You'll never make it in politics, Len. You just don't know how to lie."

The age of Bush seems like a peaceable kingdom when contrasted with the madhouse in which Nixon rose to power.

And he knows how to conjure the characters you've never heard of as well as the ones you expect. Not only Abbie Hoffman and Tom Hayden and the rest of the Chicago Seven defendants, but Thomas Aquinas Foran, one of the prosecutors in the case, a pal of (the by-now-murdered) Bobby Kennedy and a living embodiment of backlash. Not only John Lindsay, the media darling whose disastrous mayoralty helped run New York City into a ditch—Perlstein quotes a *New York Times* op-ed describing Central Park under Lindsay as "a combination of decadence and barbarism; a cut-rate *Fellini Satyricon*"—but Barry Gray, the father of talk radio, who had crusaded against McCarthyism in the '50s but attacked Lindsay from the right over law and order when the mayor, amid riots, tried to impose a Civilian Complaint Review Board on the NYPD. Not just George McGovern, who chaired the commission that took the Democratic Party away from the union leaders and urban bosses, but Fred Dutton, the commission intellectual who envisioned a new Democratic coalition shorn of blue-collar reactionaries and anchored by the votes of minorities and newly enfranchised 20-somethings.

And Richard Nixon, of course, the dominant presence in the book, brooding over all of them—a "brilliant and tormented man," Perlstein writes, "struggling to forge a public language that promised mastery of the strange new angers, anxieties, and resentments wracking the nation." The man who harnessed the furies, and found himself destroyed by them.

Nixonland is a historical narrative worth savoring—but one worth arguing with as well. Perlstein sets out to challenge what he terms "certain hegemonic narratives" of the '60s. But, perhaps inevitably, he tends to be tougher on right-wing shibboleths—the notion that all of the era's violence was left-wing; the idea that the media snatched away victory in Vietnam—than on liberal ones. *Nixonland* offers a vastly more nuanced account of how the New Deal coalition came apart than the predictable left-liberal story of noble Democrats undone by ruthless, race-baiting Republicans. (I'm looking at you, Paul Krugman.) But while Perlstein criticizes the liberal establishment for its self-satisfaction and naïveté—for believing that "if only Nixon's people could truly see *reason* ... their prejudices would melt away, their true interests would be recognized"—he still leaves the impression that when it came to public policy, mid-century liberalism almost always *did* have reason on its side.

So for instance, *Nixonland* nods at the skyrocketing crime statistics that made appeals to "law and order" more than just a racist code. But Perlstein is more interested in cataloging political violence than in counting up muggings and break-ins and murders, and he sometimes leaves the reader to assume that the post-1950s spike in lawlessness was an epiphenomenon of urban rioting, campus protest, and right-wing vigilantism, and that liberal misgovernment had little

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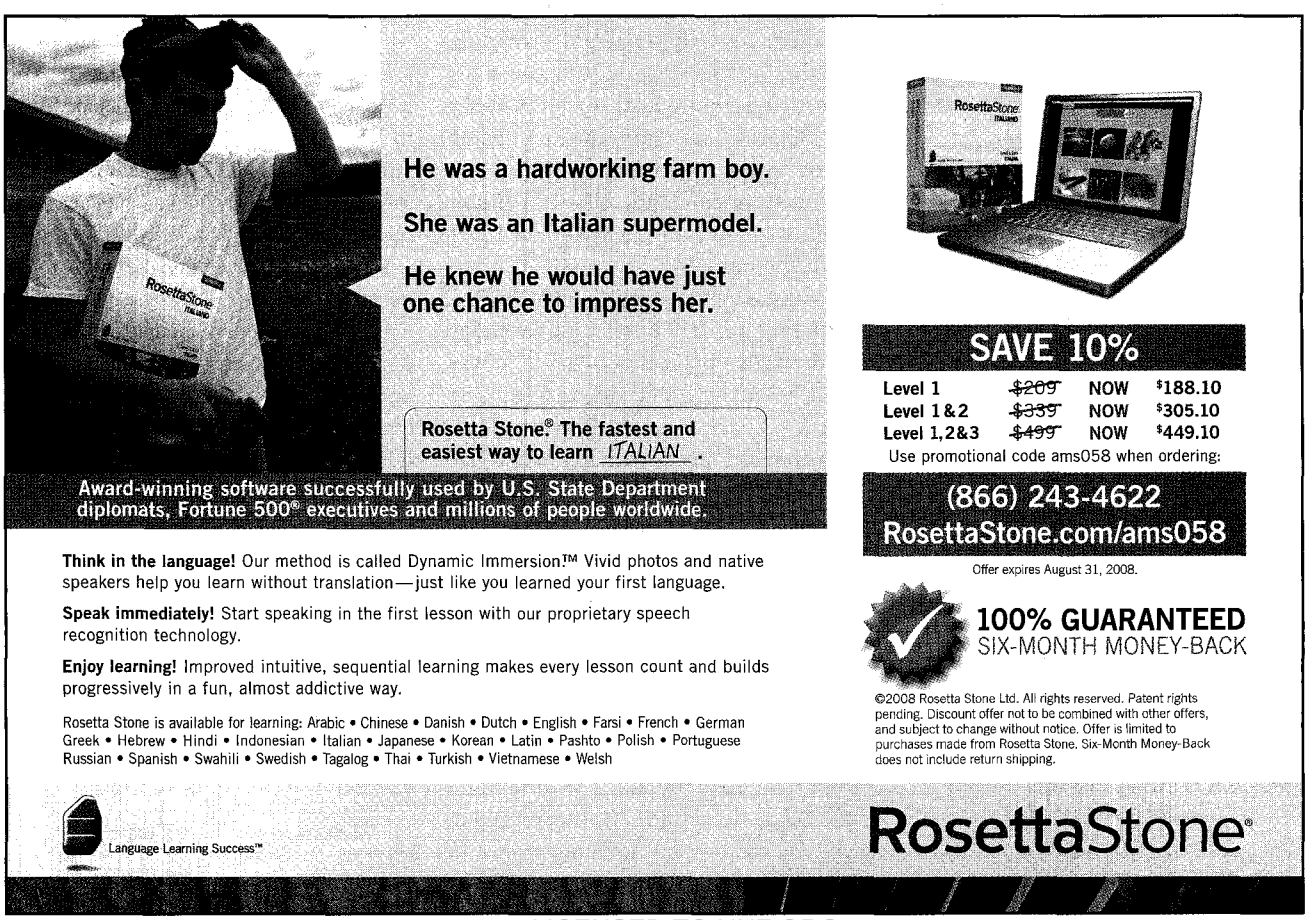
or nothing to do with it. Or again, marveling at the chutzpah of a Nixon campaign advertisement that juxtaposed Hubert Humphrey's image with shots of Appalachian poverty, Perlstein writes: "Fighting poverty had been Hubert Humphrey's greatest contribution to American public life. They were attacking him at his greatest *strength*." But attacking the Democrats on poverty was prescient as well as brazen: Humphrey was running as the heir to Lyndon Johnson's martial, free-spending approach to fighting poverty, which would end up producing at-best-ambiguous results.

In these cases, and in others, Perlstein is unsparing in his critique of the political failures of mid-century liberalism; I only wish he had meditated more deeply on liberalism's policy failures as well, and at least grappled with the possibility that voters rejected liberal governance for pragmatic reasons as well as atavistic ones. But to do so might have required him to give Nixon's Republican Party—if not Nixon himself—more credit for restoring domestic tranquillity than I imagine he thinks the GOP deserves. Indeed, a minor theme of Perlstein's book is the extent to which domestic tranquillity has *never* been restored; Americans, he argues, inhabit "Nixonland" even now.

This argument is one of Perlstein's weakest—and it's undercut, time and again, by his own skill as a historian and a writer. The chaotic tapestry he summons up—"hard hats" slugging hippies on the steps of Federal Hall on Wall Street, radical priests hatching bomb plots in the steam tunnels under Washington, D.C., riots consuming city after city, and national leaders going down under assassins' bullets—is fascinating precisely because it feels so alien to our present political climate. Indeed, the age of Bush, supposedly unrivaled in its rancor, seems like a peaceable kingdom when contrasted with the madhouse in which Richard Nixon rose to power. We have a culture war; they had a *war*.

It's true that the political and cultural divides that opened in the Nixon era are with us even now. But Perlstein wants to make a larger claim than this; he wants to suggest that the violent spirit of that time has endured till now as well. "Do Americans not hate each other enough to fantasize about killing one another, in cold blood, over political and cultural disagreements?" he writes. "It would be hard to argue that they do not." (Well, only if you treat the comment threads at Daily Kos and Free Republic as accurate barometers of the national mood, and even then it's a stretch.) And he wants to argue that there was something unprecedented, and particularly toxic, about the new majority Nixon fashioned from the wreckage of the old. "What Richard Nixon left behind," he writes,

> was the very terms of our national self-image: a notion that there are two kinds of Americans. On the one side, the "Silent Majority" ... the middle-class, middle American, suburban, exurban and rural coalition ... On the other side are the "liberals," the "cosmopolitans," the "intellectuals," the



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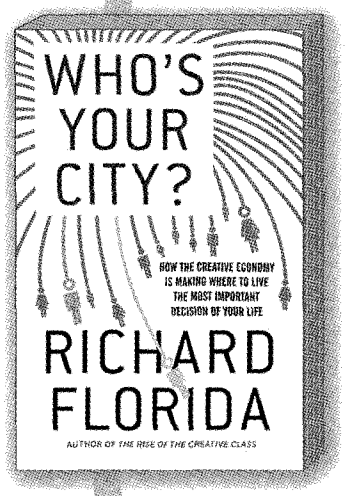
From the man who first identified
the Creative Class



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> "professionals" ... Both populations—to speak in ideal types—are equally, essentially, tragically American. And both have learned to consider the other not quite American at all.

All of this is true enough, but none of it makes Nixon's brand of politics unique. "Positive polarization" is a trick that all majority-building politicians have to manage, and the idea that one's political foes are not merely wrong but un-American is as old as the 1800 election, when Thomas Jefferson was accused of being a Jacobin in disguise and John Adams of smuggling aristocracy into the fledgling republic through the back door.

Indeed, few politicians mastered the art of positive polarization so well as the man whose majority Richard Nixon set out to undo. Much of Nixon's divisive rhetoric owes an obvious debt to FDR—the Roosevelt who pitted the "forgotten man" against the "economic royalists"; who pledged "to restore America to its own people"; who scapegoated businessmen and Wall Street as relentlessly as Richard Nixon scapegoated intellectuals and media mandarins (if we remember Nixon as a vastly more polarizing figure than FDR, it's perhaps because his targets were more likely to end up writing history books); and who anticipated Spiro Agnew in his broadsides against an un-American elite: "They are unanimous in their hate for me—and I welcome their hatred."

What distinguished Nixon from FDR wasn't his attempt to craft a new majority through a politics of division; it was what he did with that majority once he won it—which is to say, precious little. He promised "peace with honor" in Vietnam and a neoconservatism *avant la lettre* at home; he delivered four more years of bloody, unsuccessful warfare overseas and a continuation, flavored with cynicism and bad faith, of Johnson's Great Society. His political victories demonstrated that a right-of-center realignment was possible, but his administration's paranoia and criminality left the realignment for later, less tormented politicians to achieve. Roosevelt polarized the country, but for a purpose, and left the New Deal as a monument to his political achievements; Nixon's principal monument was Watergate.

And yet one doesn't have to excuse Nixon's many sins to wonder whether his mix of ruthlessness, self-interest, and low cunning might have been preferable to some of the alternatives on offer. Perlstein depicts a country on the edge of a civil war—a nation in which columnists openly speculated that America might embrace a de Gaulle–style man on horseback, or find a "President Verwoerd" (the architect of South African apartheid) to install in the Oval Office. It was a political moment when the old order could no longer govern, and the new order wasn't ready. The kids who screamed for Goldwater and McGovern would grow up to be responsible Reaganites and Clintonians, but back then they had only idealism, not experience, and *Nixonland* is an 800-page testament to the dangers of idealism run amok.

In this climate, the voters didn't choose Nixon over some neoconservative or neoliberal FDR; no such figure was available. They chose Nixon over an exhausted establishment on the one hand—nobody seems more hapless in *Nixonland* than figures like Hubert Humphrey and Nelson Rockefeller—and the fantasy politics of left and right on the other. They chose Nixon over the abyss.

Perlstein sometimes seems to suggest that Nixon *was* the abyss, and that by choosing him we vanished into it. But this misunderstands contemporary America, and it misunderstands Dick Nixon. A cynic in an age of zeal, a politician without principles at a moment that valued ideological purity above all, he was too small a man to threaten the republic. His corruptions were too petty; his schemes too penny-ante; and his spirit too cowardly, too self-interested, too venal to make him truly dangerous. And he was a bridge, thank God, to better times. Could America have done better? Perhaps. But on the evidence of *Nixonland*, we could have done far worse as well.

Ross Douthat is an *Atlantic* senior editor; his blog is at rossdouthat.theatlantic.com.

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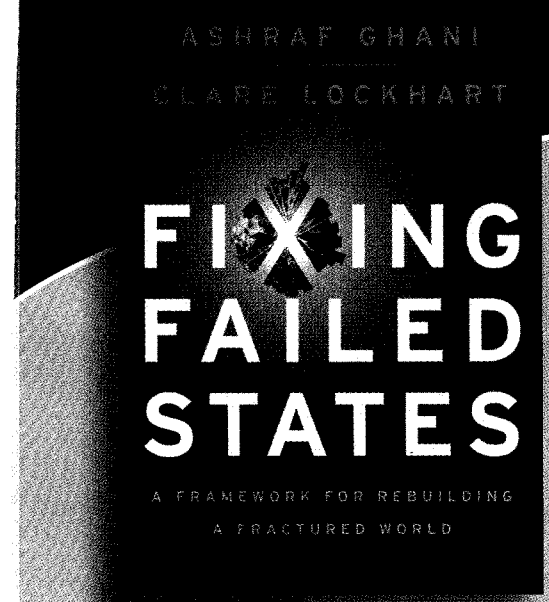
ONE BOOK AT A TIME



"This book is an important and timely alarm bell for the world's next crisis—and proves that no one knows more about how states function (and don't) than Ghani and Lockhart. We ignore their remedies at our peril."

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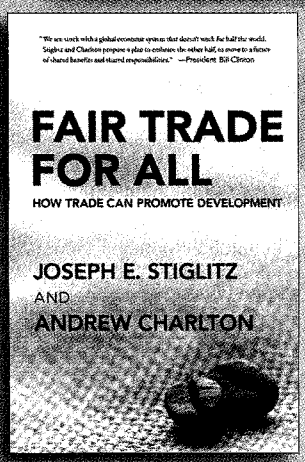

"Provocative...Stiglitz is worth listening to."
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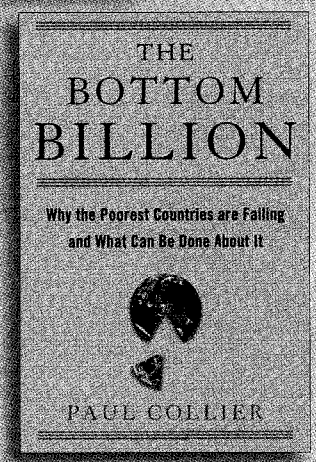

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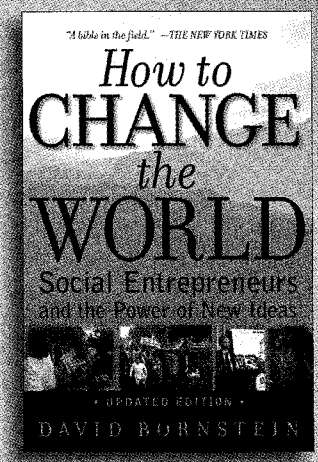

"The book is must reading for anyone who cares about building a more equitable, and therefore more stable, world."
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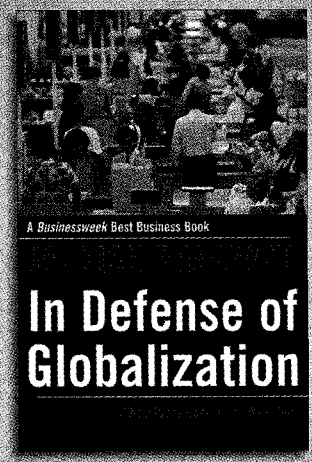

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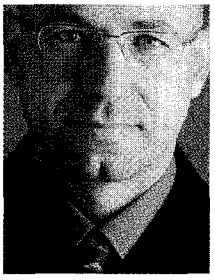
SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT

30 DAY* FREE TRIAL

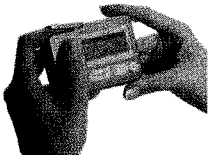
Effects of stress reversed by amazing new medical device.



Now you can enjoy the pleasures of stress-free living and feel younger in just 15 minutes a day. It's surprisingly easy with the remarkable new medical device called the StressEraser.

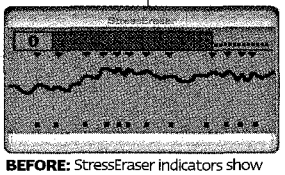
This medical breakthrough actually reverses *ergotropic tuning*; the harmful process that causes your nerves to respond faster and more strongly to stress; making you feel it more easily, more quickly, more intensely.

Medical Discovery Leads to Breakthrough in Reducing Stress.

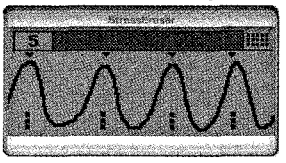


Medical researchers now know that the harmful effects of *ergotropic tuning* are intricately connected to the biological mechanisms of breathing. More importantly, they learned that you can actually regulate the stress-producing activity of this system by regulating this basic bodily function.

To do this, Helicor, Inc. has developed the amazing StressEraser that measures the effects of breathing and guides the user to control this basic biological activity.



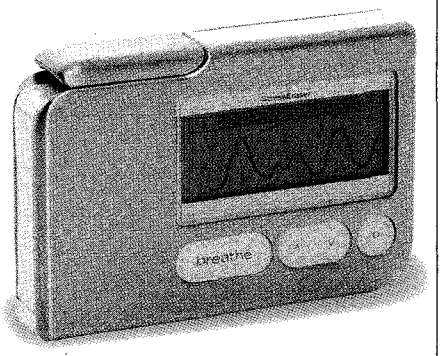
BEFORE: StressEraser indicators show the presence of physical and emotional stress and/or strained breathing.



AFTER 15 MINUTES: Harmful stress levels significantly reduced after using StressEraser cues to synchronize your breathing.

Compact and easy to use – takes just 15 minutes a day.

The StressEraser is designed to fit in the palm of your hand and is simple to operate. All it takes is a relaxing 15 minutes right before bed each night to adjust your breathing; then set it aside.



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Exec. Director, Behavioral Associates
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BOOKS

A comic genius who died young is finally getting his due.

The Last Laugh

BY JOSEPH O'NEILL

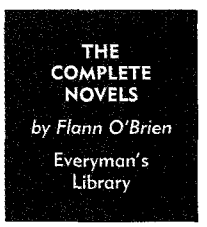
The author pseudonymously known as Flann O'Brien (1911–1966) is the shadowy and indeed overshadowed hero of modern Irish fiction, the bronze medalist on a podium otherwise occupied by Joyce (gold) and Beckett (silver). Flann O'Brien's relative inferiority is as much a matter of style as of substance. The top two were glamorously exilic, highly photogenic, eminently stern of artistic purpose. By contrast, Brian O'Nolan (the fellow behind the pseudonym) stayed put in Dublin, and very seedily so. In pictures he looks like yer man without qualities: a hat, a coat, a blur of dark little features. And except perhaps in the matter of drinking, sternness of purpose was precisely the quality he lacked: if his ambition was to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race, he never mentioned it. "I can't go on, I'll go on," the protagonist in Beckett's *The Unnamable* famously asserts. When Brian O'Nolan couldn't go on, he didn't.

FLANN O'BRIEN (né Brian O'Nolan) in the early 1950s

THE IRISH TIMES

That, at least, is how the story goes. As Anthony Cronin, O'Nolan's relentlessly perceptive biographer, points out, O'Nolan was merely in his mid-30s when he became saddled (by himself, among others) with "the legend of early, unfulfilled brilliance [and] the all too easily sustained judgement of alcoholic decline." Over time, this legend grew into a Dublin version of the parable of the prodigal son, only with a sadder ending.

It concerns a writer who grows up in an Irish-speaking household dominated by a strict, mostly silent father; who attends University College, Dublin, and following in the footsteps of Joyce, cuts a shining figure in the university's Literary and Historical Society; who in 1939 produces a first novel that sells about 250 copies (the remaining stock being incinerated by the Luftwaffe), but whose extraordinariness is recognized, in Paris, by Beckett and Joyce (it was the last book of fiction the latter would squint his way through); who in 1941 publishes a comic novel in Irish (later translated as *The Poor Mouth*) but catastrophically cannot find a publisher for his second novel in English (completed 1940); who consequently abandons fiction to become, as a columnist for *The Irish Times*, a renowned humorist and satirist by the name of Myles na Gopaleen, simultaneously pursuing a career in the Irish civil service; who in sum falls, qua novelist, into a two-decade-deep creative hole out of which he only just clambers with the publication of a charming if parochial comedy (*The Hard Life*, 1961) and an amusing if stilted satire (*The Dalkey Archive*, 1964). Then, with overseas critical opinion unexpectedly cohering in his favor (V. S. Pritchett, Philip Toynbee, Anthony Burgess, and other connoisseurs have recently declared themselves Flann O'Brien fans), Brian O'Nolan, aged 54 and suffering from cancer, drops dead. It is April Fools' Day.



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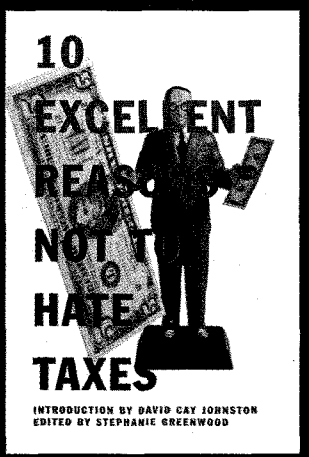

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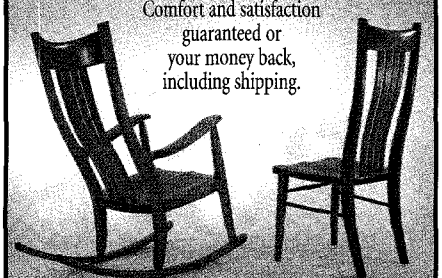
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This misfortunate narrative is factually correct and consonant with O'Nolan's irremediable view of himself as a literary flop. However, as the timely appearance of *Flann O'Brien: The Complete Novels* reminds one, the narrative has a serious flaw: it overlooks the detail that, however foiled he might have been by drink and self-doubt, and however impure his dedication to art, O'Nolan was, in the deepest sense, very lucky. It so happened that two of his five novels were of an originality and durability beyond the scope of almost every other writer, no matter how committed or self-confident.

The first of these is his earliest, most famous novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (an opaque title O'Nolan disliked but could not improve on). It owed its publication to the fluke of Graham Greene's having been assigned to read it by Longmans (of London). Greene was knocked out. The book (which was "in the line of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*," he reported) filled him with "continual excitement, amusement and the kind of glee one experiences when people smash china on the stage." O'Nolan's "wild, fantastic, magnificently comic notion" (Greene) was to write a novel, in the false name of Flann O'Brien, whose protagonist, an idle, dissolute Dublin student, is writing a novel whose protagonist, a man named Trellis, is writing a novel whose protagonists—stock characters hauled out of genre novels, Oirishness, myths, Irish public houses—conspire to win their freedom from their writer by writing a novel of which he (Trellis) is the protagonist, thereby hoisting him with his own authorial petard.

Got that?

Strangely enough, *At Swim-Two-Birds* reads with a startling clarity. It has to, or it wouldn't be funny. And it's very, very funny. You have a student whose ridiculous particularity of expression is matched only by his personal squalor:

> [I] put myself with considerable difficulty into bed, where I remained for three days on the pretence of a chill. I was compelled to secrete my suit beneath the mattress because it was offensive to at least two of the senses and bore an explanation of my illness contrary to that already advanced.

You have brilliant pastiche—of Irish myth, for example:

> Finn MacCool was ... a man of superb physique and development. Each of his thighs was as thick as a horse's belly, narrowing to a calf as thick as the belly of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was large enough to halt the march of men through a mountain-pass.

You have affectionate, deadly renderings of petit bourgeois blather:

> That was one thing, said Shanahan wisely, that the Irish race was always noted for, one place where the world had to give us best. With all his faults and by God he has plenty, the Irishman can jump. By God he can jump. That's one thing the Irish race is honored for no matter where it goes or where you find it—jumping ... Go to Russia, said Shanahan, go to China, go to France. Everywhere and all the time it is hats off and a gra-ma-cree to the Jumping Irishman.

And much, much more—all of it written with extraordinarily sustained verbal and tonal control (ironic, given the novel's preoccupations). It's this command and almost shocking cleverness that authorizes one to take an interest in *At Swim-Two-Birds* from a theoretical viewpoint, as does the statement (propounded by the student/writer) that "the modern novel should be largely a work of reference ... to existing works." Not bad, that, given the nonexistence at the time of post-structuralism or, indeed, structuralism. It quickly becomes clear that, in a single short volume (212 pages), O'Nolan in 1939 ran through practically every forthcoming development of metafiction and literary theory. *At Swim-Two-Birds* laughingly trashes the assumptions that stabilize the relationship between reader and novel, creator and created, original and derivative, imagined and actual, highbrow and lowbrow, and just about any other binary opposite conventionally applicable to fiction: by any standards, a thorough deconstruction. If you're considering writing a novel that you think might be clever about novels, read *At Swim-Two-Birds*

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and consider how stupid you may look by comparison.

In any event, read *The Third Policeman*, the next Flann O'Brien novel. If *At Swim-Two-Birds* annihilates axiomatic notions of what it means to read and write, *The Third Policeman* annihilates axiomatic notions of what it means to exist. Its narrator is a man with a wooden leg who, to his own puzzlement, has no name that he can recall. He commits a chilling murder-robbery to finance his scholarly interest in de Selby, a lunatic savant who believes, for example, that nocturnal darkness is an "insanitary condition of the atmosphere due to accretions of black air," and who attributes the "softening and degeneration of the human race ... to its progressive predilection for interiors and waning interest in the art of going out and staying there," asserting therefore that "a row of houses" is "a row of necessary evils." De Selby is the subject of hilariously digressive academic footnotes (shades of *Pale Fire*, you would say, but for the fact that Nabokov had not yet written it); the main text is primarily concerned with the adventures of our antihero who, wandering through a weirdly defamiliarized rural district, comes to be detained by a pair of cheerfully batty policemen. Their worldview is what you might call bicyclogical: things fully make sense only when regarded through a lens involving tire pumps, handlebars, and light dynamos. It's connected to the "Atomic Theory":

> People who spend most of their natural lives riding iron bicycles over the rocky roadsteads of this parish get their personalities mixed up with the personalities of their bicycle as a result of the interchanging of the atoms of each of them and you would be surprised at the number of people in these parts who nearly are half people and half bicycles.

There are other astounding phenomena. The police barracks is two-dimensional. A secret fraternity of one-legged men reveals itself. A policeman carves a series of ever-smaller chests, "the smallest of all being nearly half a size smaller

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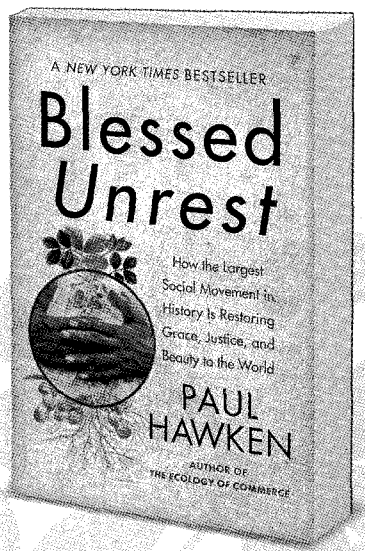

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than ordinary invisibility," so that the narrator blurts, "I became afraid. What he was doing was no longer wonderful but terrible." This terror gives way to another: namely, that one's very body might be

> a body with another body inside it in turn, thousands of such bodies within each other like the skins of an onion, receding to some unimaginable ultimum ... Who or what was the core and what monster in what world was the final uncontained colossus? God? Nothing?

As the phenomenological uncertainties begin to pile up, the reader is quietly led out of a comic landscape and dropped into an ontological chasm; in fact, he is left in a state of as much anxiety as hilarity. And of course the novel's famous surprise ending—a retying of the knot more than a denouement—does nothing to help.

gained, in addition to canonical status, a small if peculiarly intense following. Rather bizarrely, the novel recently found a substantial new audience after a paperback copy made a two-second appearance on the cult TV drama *Lost*.

Brian O'Nolan would have appreciated this kind of success. He referred to *The Third Policeman* (and to his other fiction) as stuff written to make you laugh. He would have regarded it as terrible pose to place the book somewhere between the pataphysics of Alfred Jarry (the scientist of imaginary solutions) and the metaphysics of Martin Heidegger (the analyst of the hermeneutics of facticity). A Catholic and, in the persona of Myles na Gopaleen, an enemy of pretension and cant, he undermined most claims to importance—his own most assiduously of all. This creates a Flann O'Brien–worthy conundrum: How can we credit him with being a literary or philosophical radical if he had no intention of being one?

With overseas critical opinion unexpectedly cohering in his favor, O'Nolan, aged 54, drops dead. It is April Fools' Day.

O'Nolan's liquid sense of reality, so helpful in his writing, was mirrored to an unfortunate degree in his own life, where he was prone to damaging confusions. Just as de Selby suffers from an inability to distinguish between men and women, O'Nolan suffered from an inability to distinguish between fame and artistic success (he moaned, not entirely facetiously, "*Gone With the Wind* keeps me awake at night sometimes—I mean, the quantity of potatoes earned by the talented lady novelist"). The limited impact of *At Swim-Two-Birds* led O'Nolan to dismiss it as a "bum book," and when *The Third Policeman* failed to find a home (too "fantastic," in the judgment of his publisher), he concluded that this book, too, was worthless. Rather than be humiliated in the eyes of Dublin, O'Nolan took to claiming that the manuscript had been lost (variously, in a tramcar, a hotel, a train). It hadn't. It was published posthumously in 1967 and

There is a two-part answer. First, O'Nolan couldn't help himself: his comic instinct drew him helplessly into the profoundest theoretical concerns and, once there, to an amazing prescience. Take the Atomic Theory: respectable philosophers of the mind now hold that all matter, and therefore every bicycle, involves consciousness (seriously: it's called panpsychism). Second, he wasn't who he pretended to be. He wanted us to see through Brian O'Nolan and his hard-boiled Dublin dismissiveness, to see beyond the local legend of wasted talent. He wanted us to see Flann O'Brien: Why, otherwise, would he have bothered with him at all? And what we see, when we simply read the books, is that Flann O'Brien did not shrink from his genius.

Joseph O'Neill's novel, *Netherland*, is being published this month by Pantheon.

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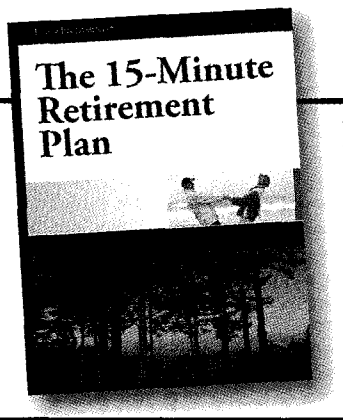

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BOOKS

In Cyril Connolly's classic memoir, the young grow rotten before they are ripe.

Arrested Development

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Let us without delay get to the core statement of Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*, which first appeared in 1938, survived a slightly revised reappearance in 1948, has just been reissued (and is very ably introduced by Alex Woloch) by the University of Chicago Press, and has seemed to challenge us to reconsider it in every intervening decade:

> Promise! Fatal word, half-bribe and half-threat, round whose exact meaning centered many tearful childhood interviews. "But you promised you wouldn't", "but *that* wasn't a promise", "Yes it was—you haven't kept your promise", till the meaning expands and the burden of the oath under which we grew up becomes the burden of expectation which we can never fulfill. "Blossom and blossom and promise of blossom, but never a fruit"—the cry first heard in the nursery is taken up by the schoolmaster, the friendly aunt, the doting grandmother, the inverted bachelor uncle. Dons with long reproachful faces will utter it and the friends of dons; the shapes and simulacrums which our parents have taken, the father-substitutes and mother-types which we have projected will accuse us and all await our ritual suicide. Whom the gods wish to destroy they first call promising.

If this were merely a cri de coeur of self-pity, emitted by a child of privilege who confuses his own spoiled embarrassment of choices with the shades of Wordsworth's prison-house closing about the growing boy, we could safely ridicule and despise it. But one of Connolly's great gifts was self-deprecation, and one of his easier styles was that of the tongue in the cheek. He puts one in mind of two of the great contemporaries about whom he wrote—George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh. Here is Orwell, who was at the same boys' boarding school as Connolly, recalling the psychological "promise" torture inflicted by the headmaster's wife:

PETER MARLOW/MAGNUM PHOTOS

> Do you *want* to throw all your chances away? You know your people aren't rich, don't you? You know they can't afford the same things as other boys' parents. How are they to send you to a public school if you don't win a scholarship? I know how proud your mother is of you. Do you *want* to let her down?

Connolly could not have read Orwell's memoir—*Such, Such Were the Joys*—before composing his own, and he managed to survive the same gruesome school by exerting himself to be charming instead of a rebel; but it is difficult to believe that Waugh did not read *Enemies of Promise* before writing *Brideshead Revisited*. There are too many felicitous coincidences: Anthony Blanche selects exactly Connolly's languid Continental menu (omelette, peach, Vichy water), and Connolly's account of his first visit in company to Provence is the perfect antecedent of Charles and Sebastian's first glimpse of Venice. In both books, the name for a certain kind of boy at Eton is *bitch*. And in *Brideshead*, it is charm that does duty for promise:

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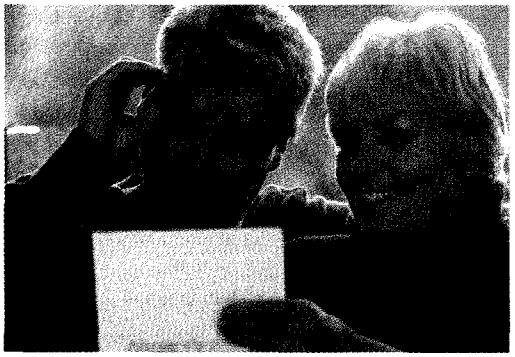

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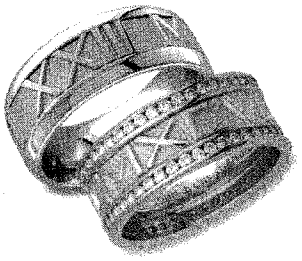

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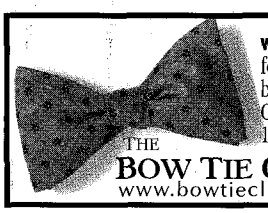

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> simple, creamy English charm, playing tigers ... Charm is the great English blight. It does not exist outside these damp islands. It spots and kills anything it touches. It kills love; it kills art.

On this analysis, it is actually a good thing that promise has acquired a few enemies; otherwise the phonies and poseurs and spongers and mere aesthetes (afflicted with "the virus of good taste," as Connolly phrases it) would have things all their own way. Connolly's "charm" was that he was honest about the motivations and hypocrisies that kept him going: the glittering prizes that he yearned for if only so that, by acquiring them, he could make fun of them. His redemption from charm was his readiness to look unpleasant facts in the face and his ability to tell a person of integrity from a well-disguised impostor.

Like a centaur, or perhaps a bit more like a pantomime horse, *Enemies of Promise* divides into two halves: the critical and the autobiographical. In the first half, Connolly surveys the literary scenery of his day and employs as his scaffolding and *Waste Land* surrogate George Crabbe's bleak and sarcastic poem *The Village*. This, with its vividly negative bucolic imagery of "the blighted rye," "the blue Bugloss," "the slimy Mallow," and "the Charlock's shade," allows him a special taxonomy of weeds and thistles as well as of growth without roots.

ENEMIES OF PROMISE
by Cyril Connolly
Chicago

In the second half, titled "A Georgian Boyhood," he gives a lavishly detailed account of his education between the ages of 8 and 18, and shows an extraordinary confidence in the likelihood that this narrative will not prove ephemeral. The best-known phrase from this section is his "theory of permanent adolescence" as a description of the marination process of the English upper class. I should call this a coinage if it did not seem to me to derive from the "perpetual adolescent" fixation that comes to us from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther,* but, as with Connolly's verdict on promise, it is very originally phrased, and it comes so close to the end of the book that it truly resembles a conclusion arrived at rather than a prejudice or proposition being demonstrated:

> It is the theory that the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development. From these it results that the greater part of the ruling class remains adolescent, school-minded, self-conscious, cowardly, sentimental and in the last analysis homosexual. Early laurels weigh like lead and of many of the boys whom I knew at Eton, I can say that their lives are over.

That aphorism about the laurels and the lead must have seemed too good to pass up at the time, and it is not the only example of Connolly's fatal ability to sacrifice (like Wilde) coherence or seriousness for a good line. "There is no more somber enemy of good art than the pram in the hall," Connolly famously wrote, quite ignoring the many artists and authors who have been moved to work precisely because of their children. Famous for repartee and for believing that he could fashion one riposte that would work for every occasion, he "spent weeks in elaborating it. At that time the magic phrase seemed, 'Dear me, how very uninteresting!' If I had to choose one now it would be 'This is a very bad moment for both of us.'" Announcing his election to an elite school club that normally scorned intellectuals, he showed a gift for simile by describing how the swells and toffs came rolling in to congratulate him, "like the college of cardinals arriving to congratulate some pious old freak whom fate had elevated to the throne of St Peter." Nearly Wildean is his offhand observation, "Like many lazy people, once I started working I could not stop; perhaps that is why we avoid it." Nonetheless, for throw-away effect, one of the most striking—and least Wildean—turns in the book is this one, which occurs in a catalog of

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volumes digested and authors chalked up: "Orwell lent me *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But I could not swallow it. It was not necessary." At that time Orwell was not at all famous, but Connolly got the point of him early on, even if he did not allow for the fact that here was an author who would adopt a child rather than have a hallway without a pram in it (and even if he could come up with the flabbergastingly inane view that *Dorian Gray* was, of all extraordinary things, "not necessary").

Still, the willingness to take risks and be hit-or-miss was part of Connolly's technique, which depended in turn on making difficult things look easy and vice versa: "By the time I had left Eton I knew by heart something of the literature of five civilizations." This style—of effortless and almost bored superiority—is supposed to be the hallmark of the Oxford College to which Connolly subsequently took himself, but it is to preempt some of that charge, I think, that he makes quite a few references to his own physical ugliness and lack of sex appeal and, in the 1948 introduction, the following breezy concession: "On every page I have retouched the writing itself (it was Edmund Wilson who remarked that it was not a very well-written book and put me on to this)."

One might picture the dedication: "To Edmund Wilson, for helping me to see that this book was not very well written ... " The aspirant (male) writer, to whom the book is actually addressed, might learn more from this unguarded moment than from some of the more ostensibly sapient advice that is offered in part one. This section, which alternates rather oddly between witty recommendations of hedonism and dilettantism and some stern warnings against these things, contains the following almost bootstrap-oriented counsel:

> When suffering from social envy of other writers there is only one cure—to work. Whatever consideration they are enjoying may then come your way and in any case by working you are doing what they would most envy you.

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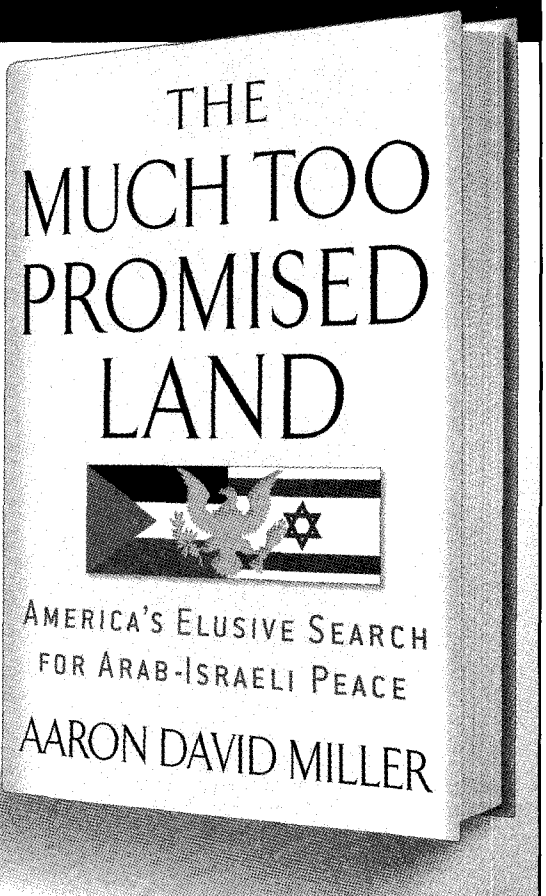

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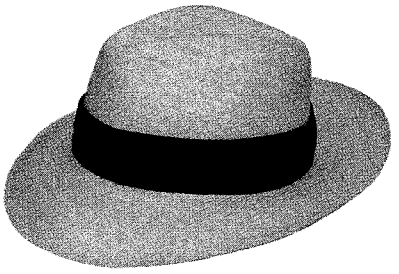

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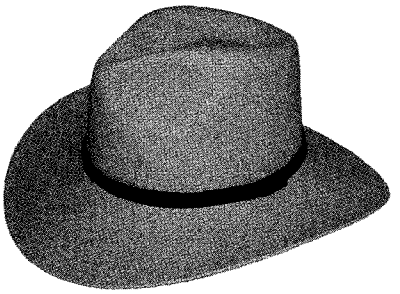

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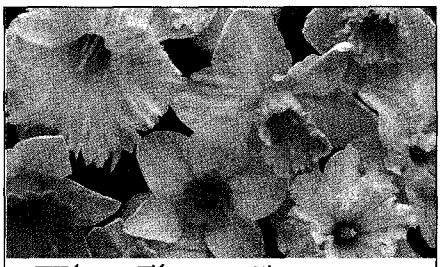

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It doesn't quite go on a knitted sampler, if only because its cynicism is a fraction too evident, but it will do.

Frivolity and brittleness—what Connolly himself termed his "futilitarianism"—will take you only so far. There is a sterner theme that unifies both halves of the book and supplies a sort of steel thread through the 1938 edition. In the section on "The Charlock's Shade," Connolly speaks very firmly to all those whose first concern is with their reputations:

> A writer must grow used to the idea that culture as we know it may disappear and remain lost for ever or till it is excavated, a thousand years hence, from a new Herculaneum. Horace's boast of immortality, his "*non omnis moriar*", neither anticipated the hostility of the church nor the ignorance of the Dark Ages. Of his two thousand years of posthumous life, a thousand slid by in a coma. One has but to consider the dearth of writers in Italy and Germany, the extinction of the cultural activity of the Weimar republic or the war waged by those countries against the intelligentsia of Spain to perceive how ephemeral are the securest literary reputations, the most flourishing movements. At any moment the schools of Athens may be closed, the libraries burnt, the teachers exterminated, the language suppressed. Any posthumous fame or the existence of any posterity capable of appreciating the arts we care for, can be guaranteed only by fighting for it and for many who fight, there will be no stake in the future but a name on a war-memorial.

On the very last page of the book, almost as if he doesn't know that he is repeating himself, he makes the same point in a more epigrammatic way:

> In spite of the slow conversion of progressive ideas into the fact of history, the Dark Ages have a way of coming back. Civilisation—the world of affection and reason and freedom and justice—is a luxury which must be fought for, as dangerous to possess as an oil-field or an unlucky diamond.

The Connolly who wrote that second paragraph is the man who helped keep English letters alive during the war,

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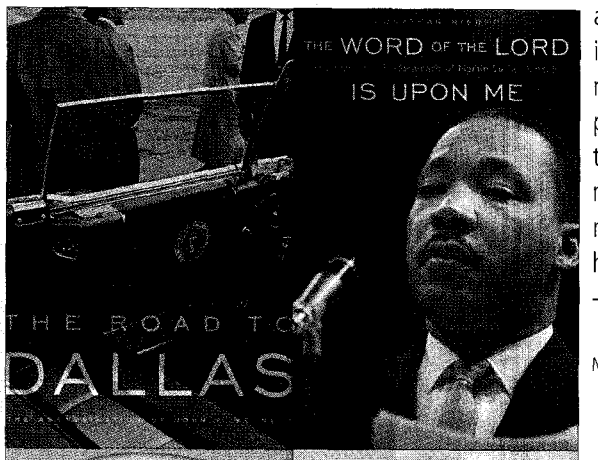

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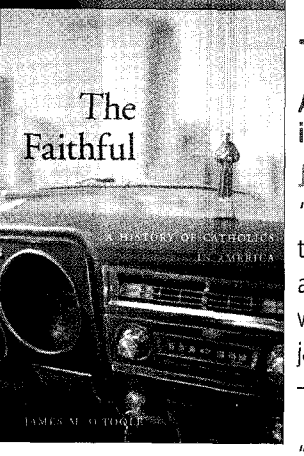

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finding enough paper on which to print his magazine *Horizon* and knowing where to get a decent bottle of wine even during the Blitz. The Connolly who wrote the first paragraph is the boy who was, despite his protests to the contrary, paying attention in the school chapel when the roll of honor was being read out, and while the bugles sounded for the fallen.

I cannot resist a closing irony of history. To illustrate his theory that English schoolboys grow rotten, so to speak, before they are ripe, Connolly selected an aristocratic contemporary named Alec Dunglass:

> He was a votary of the esoteric Eton religion, the kind of graceful, tolerant, sleepy boy who is showered with favors and crowned with all the laurels, who is liked by the masters and admired by the boys without any apparent exertion on his part, without experiencing the ill-effects of success himself or arousing the pangs of envy in others. In the eighteenth century he would have become Prime Minister before he was thirty; as it was he appeared honorably ineligible for the struggle of life.

Even as *Enemies of Promise* was being published, but apparently without engaging Connolly's notice, the "graceful, tolerant, sleepy" Lord Dunglass was acting as one of Neville Chamberlain's private secretaries in the selling of Prague to Hitler at Munich. In 1963, under the more modest civilian name of Sir Alec Douglas-Home, he did in fact become a rather short-lived Tory prime minister. If there was one thing on which I would have wagered a good deal, it was the impossibility of Britain's ever again being governed by a waistcoated charmer from that particular school. Yet here we are 70 years on, and the British Conservatives are led by an old Etonian named David Cameron, who was also a member of a *Brideshead*-type dining club at Oxford. And all the indications are that he could oust "New Labour" from power. I dare say you could call that promising.

Chistopher Hitchens is an *Atlantic* contributing editor and a *Vanity Fair* columnist.

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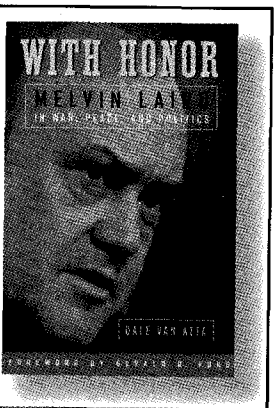

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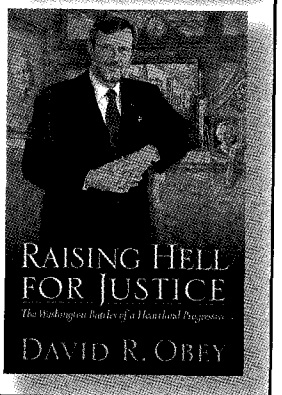

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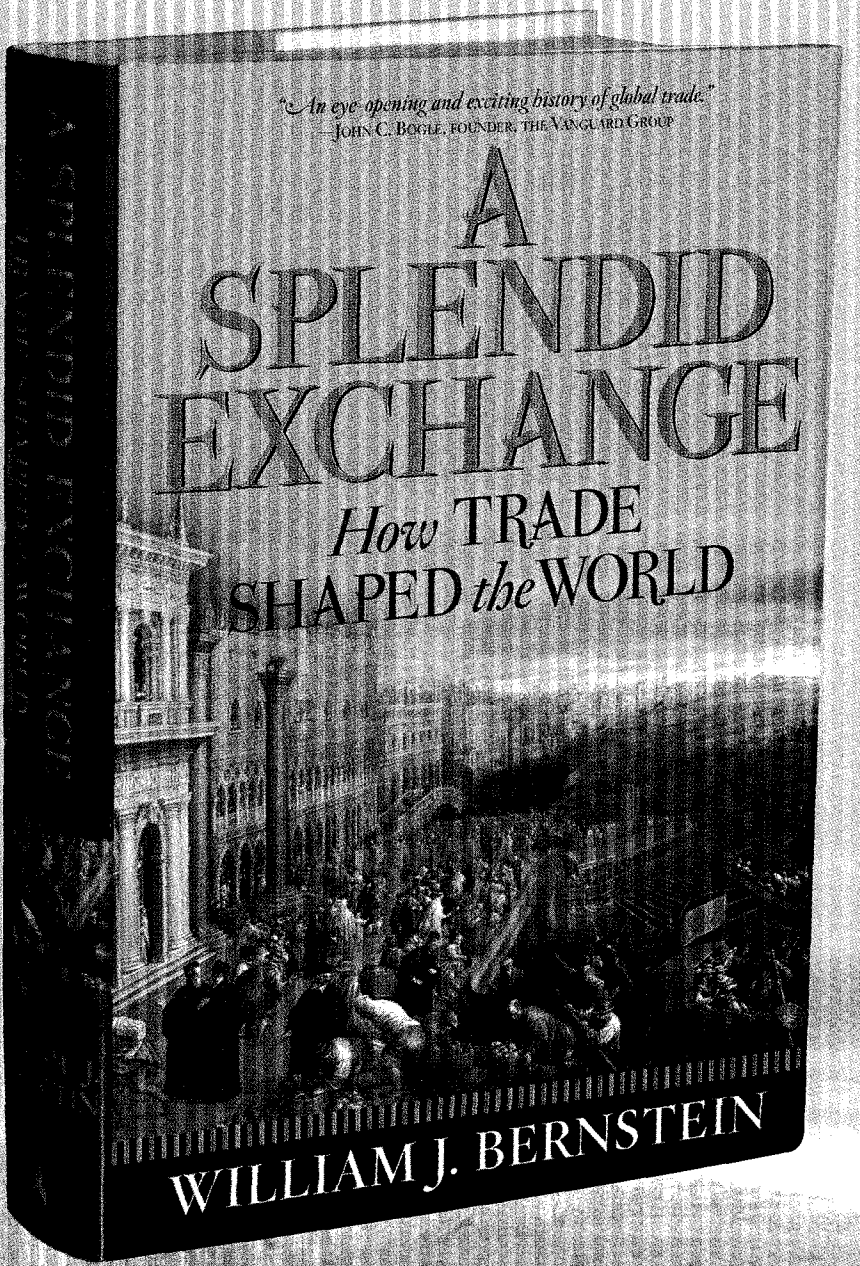

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BOOKS

A guide to additional releases

COVER to COVER

HISTORY

Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire
by Judith Herrin (Princeton)
"Endless books are written on Byzantine history," writes Herrin, "too many to count and most too long to read." Hers, though, takes an innovative approach—28 short chapters, roughly chronological, that produce a linear mosaic of some 1,100 years, from the reign of Constantine to the triumph of the Ottomans in 1461. The topics range from general background—"Greek Orthodoxy," "Roman Law"—to more-sensational stuff like "Eunuchs," "Icon Veneration," and the 12th-century scholar-princess Anna Komnene. The scope is broad—religion, politics, art, war, gender—and the style lively and personal, though some of the brief chapters could be briefer still. Herrin's earlier books, *The Formation of Christendom* (1987) and *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (2004), also are formidable, and neither is too long to read.

Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis
by George Makari (HarperCollins)
No other behavioral science is as distinctly linked with the 20th century as psychology; no other branch of psychology is as basic to clinical and popular understanding as psychoanalysis; and no other figure looms as large in psychoanalysis (or much else) as Sigmund Freud. Makari, a psychiatrist and historian at Cornell, uses this hard-to-disprove (if hidebound) premise as his jumping-off point. Happily, he doesn't stop there. Instead, he concocts a chronological tripartite ordering—Freud's synthesis of existing strains of science, medicine, and philosophy; the spread of Freudianism and its schismatic discontents (think Jung, Adler, Bleuler, et al.); the post–World War I re-formation and reconstitution of this pluralistic community—as he conducts a "historical examination of the core questions at the heart of the most influential theory of human inner life."

The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentacostalism in the American South
by Randall J. Stephens (Harvard)
When the holiness and pentecostal revival moved to the South in the early 1900s, the movement was explosively iconoclastic. Believers—overwhelmingly the poor and disenfranchised—exalted women as inspired preachers and obliterated social distinctions between blacks and whites. The revivals converted millions by offering a millennial message of personal sinlessness and divine illumination. Stephens's masterful account of how the South nurtured and altered a once-marginalized religious movement—and how that religion influenced the region—is the most fluent and authoritative synthesis of a complex and controversial subject.

SOCIETY *and* CULTURE

Spiral Jetta: A Road Trip Through the Land Art of the American West
by Erin Hogan (Chicago)
The title's overly coy allusion to Robert Smithson's masterpiece doesn't detract from a smart and winning book. Hogan, the public-affairs director at the Art Institute of Chicago, does her best to arrange an unhappy marriage—a land-art tour "through the states of Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas" and "through the states of anxiety, drunkenness, disorientation, and heat exhaustion"—but the reader emerges enlightened and even delighted. After all, making critical theory fun is quite a feat. Casually scrutinizing the artistic works *Sun Tunnels*, *Double Negative*, *Roden Crater*, and *Lightning Field* while gamely playing up her fish-out-of-water status, Hogan delivers an ingenuously engaging travelogue-cum-art history.

Lucian Freud
by William Feaver (Rizzoli)
Lucian Freud—grandson of Sigmund—may well be, as the critic Robert Hughes pronounced him, "the greatest living realist painter." He's certainly Britain's most celebrated (German-born, Freud fled as a child to England in 1933). But his work has always been easier to esteem than to love: his startling portraits of nudes reclining in his dilapidated studio on less-than-freshly-made mattresses present sexuality and the human body in the most unvarnished manner (as a *Le Monde* reviewer nicely put it, Freud's depictions of flesh resemble poorly carved ham). Feaver's usually intelligent but occasionally gaseous book examines the artist's oeuvre, which spans 70 years. Much of it is in private collections, so this volume, which displays more than 400 works (many reproduced for the first time), is by far the most important study of Freud to date.

Cop in the Hood: My Year Policing Baltimore's Eastern District
by Peter Moskos (Princeton)
Those prone to facile comparisons will liken this riveting book to *The Wire*, the acclaimed and popular cable-television series that inhabits the same mean streets. Those who take a longer view, however, will see this for what it is: an unsparing boys-in-blue procedural that succeeds on its own plentiful—and wonderfully sympathetic—merits. Moskos, now an assistant professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, deftly intermingles cops-and-robbers verisimilitude and progressive social science, yet keeps his reportage clear-eyed, his

PETER HOEY

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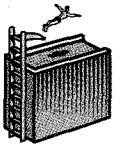
conclusions pathos-free. What results is a thoughtful, measured critique—of the failed drug war, its discontents, and the self-defeating criminal-justice system looming just beyond.

Why We're Liberals
by Eric Alterman (Viking)
Alterman spends a lot of time clearing away the falsehoods spread by both right-wing and mainstream media figures, but the core of the book is a vigorous defense of liberalism as a credo—a credo, Alterman argues persuasively, that most Americans actually subscribe to in its constituent parts. Acknowledging that liberalism is notoriously difficult to define, he nonetheless provides an extensive and nuanced analysis of its substance.

BIOGRAPHY *and* MEMOIR

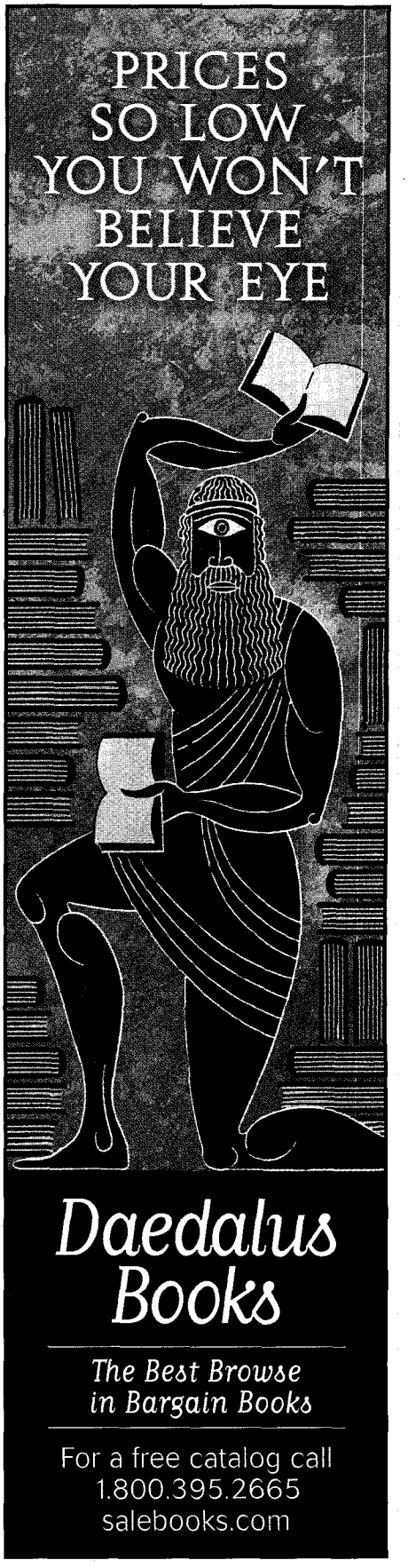
David and Winston
by Robert Lloyd George (Overlook)
Churchill's Bodyguard
by Tom Hickman (Headline)
From Churchill's War Rooms: Letters of a Secretary 1943–45
by Joanna Moody (Tempus)
The two men who led the British to victory in successive world wars—David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill—were only 11 years apart and were partners in government for most of the first quarter of the 20th century. *David and Winston* reminds us that Churchill—generally seen through the prism of his later years as an arch-reactionary Tory—was, with his senior colleague, an important figure in the radical Liberal government that laid the foundation for Britain's social-security system. Robert Lloyd George's argument that his great-grandfather enduringly influenced Churchill becomes a little thin in the 1930s and 1940s, when the two men clashed over the policy toward Nazi Germany and a host of domestic issues. Nonetheless, his book illuminates the lasting personal relationship between them. It also shows an attractive and generous side of Churchill's character and conduct—as do these two other books about people who, unlike Lloyd George, worked for Churchill, not with him. The Great Man seems to have been the exception to the rule that no man is a hero to his valet. Although he was a demanding and sometimes ill-tempered boss, he apparently inspired endless loyalty and affection in those who labored to serve and protect him under often trying circumstances.

FICTION



The Rain Before It Falls
by Jonathan Coe (Knopf)
Acclaimed for his satires of life in Birmingham, England, Coe explores in this poignant novel, set in the same region, the maddening and tragic generational repercussions that result when those who have children aren't the ones who want them. Especially touching is the depiction of its first-person narrator: an elderly woman who, evacuated in childhood during the war, formed an attachment to her manipulative older cousin that will become the source of both the happiest and most sorrowful moments of her life (a neat and realistic paradox that is ultimately Coe's theme and that might describe the very essence of parenthood). Coe's style here, well-suited to his protagonist, is dignified and sure, often almost dry in its directness. The fault of this skillfully layered and plotted novel is its structure: Coe introduces each narrative segment by describing a photograph—a jerky and distancing device, as tedious as watching vacation slides.

The Soul Thief
by Charles Baxter (Pantheon)
Baxter's vivid characters and their particular milieus—barefoot graduate students in early-'70s Buffalo, for instance, or the desk clerk in a familiar Sunset Strip hotel, or the suburban father of two teenage boys—exemplify the most rewarding form of realism. His scenes are so acutely observed and so fluidly presented that to read them is to live them, but with far more sensitivity and insight than anyone can bring to real life. He depicts larger events—a rape and a mental breakdown—less compellingly, and ultimately this naggingly sinister book works better as a set of scenes about an intellectual's life derailed and recovered than as a novel. Like Baxter's previous novel, *The Feast of Love*, this one has a metaphysical dimension, but here the idea overbalances the story, and the effect is unsatisfying rather than enhancing.



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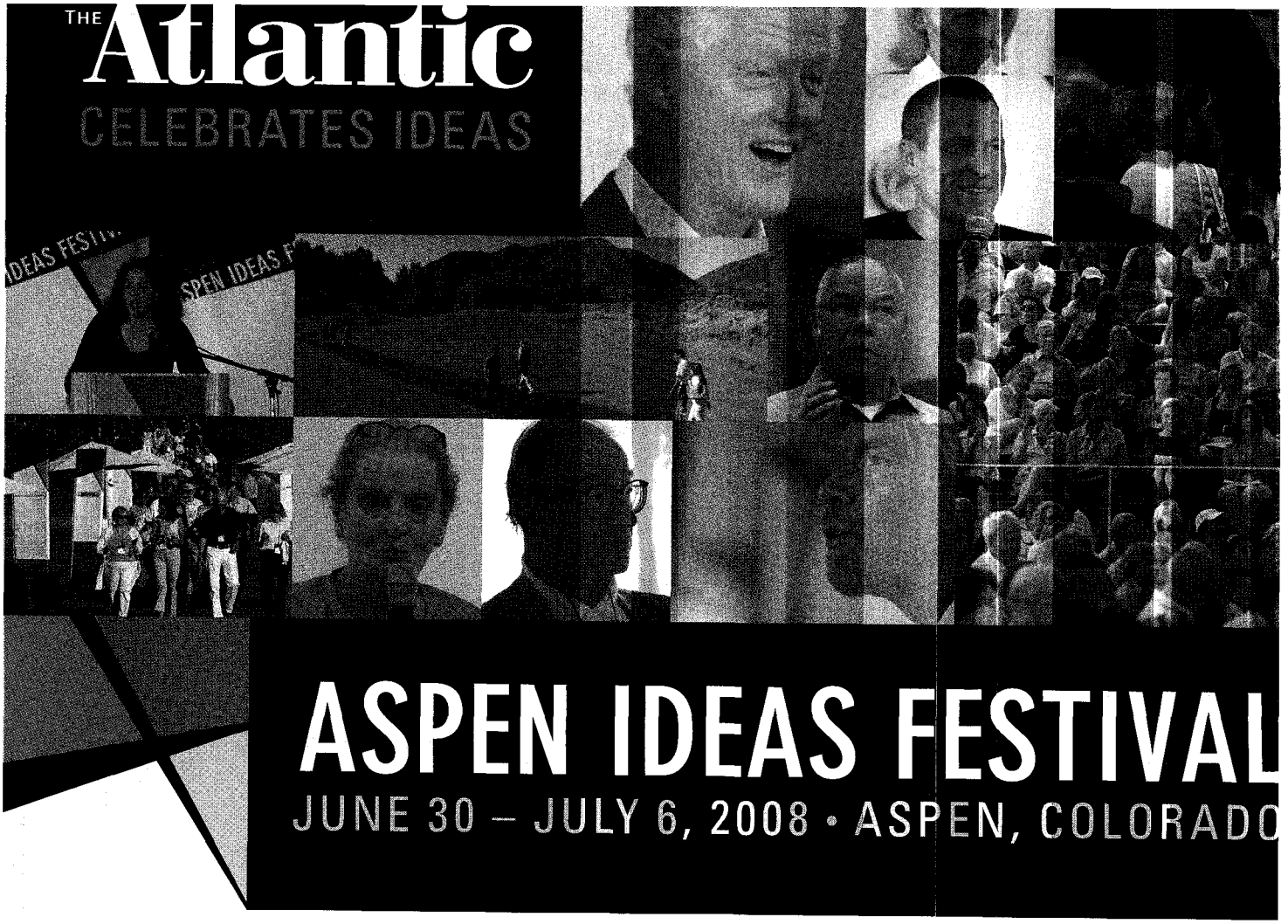

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WHERE TO NEXT? A sign in Seattle's Fremont district

JOSEPH SOHM/CORBIS

TRAVELS

Our correspondent visits Seattle with only the hive mind of the Internet as his guide.

Weni, Widi, Wiki

BY WAYNE CURTIS

A light rain was falling when I arrived in Seattle late at night after a long flight from the East Coast. A shuttle driver collected a half dozen of us by calling our names off the tiny screen of his pager. In the damp, woolly-smelling van, a GPS unit on the dashboard issued directions to downtown in a soft and soothing female voice, at least up to the point where she said, "Three hundred feet, turn right on Seneca." The driver ignored her advice, going straight and muttering, "What the hell?" The GPS lady retaliated by endlessly repeating, "Recalculating, recalculating," in that bland, passive-aggressive way GPS units have, until the driver reached up and shut her off. We then circled the block three times in silence, looking for a hotel that refused to appear, the neon signs of Seattle beautifully pixelated through windows spattered with raindrops.

To travel these days is to plunge into an information cloud that, like a real cloud, can look more substantial than it really is. Booking travel online was among the first popular applications of the Web, to the great annoyance of travel agents. Now, with Web 2.0 and the ubiquity of user-generated information, someone setting off on a trip can dredge up all manner of suggestions and insider tips online, to the great annoyance of professional travel writers. Travel bees everywhere, it seems, are gathering nectar and bringing it back to the hive.

Which leaves one to wonder: How sweet is their honey?

Curious, during a four-day trip to Seattle last fall I relied solely on user-generated information. Seattle seemed the perfect destination for this experiment—I was unfamiliar with the city, and I figured that its hypercaffeinated, digitally literate residents (the region is home to Microsoft, Amazon, and Expedia) should make for a complex online ecology. I'd leave guidebooks at home, ignore the racks of tourist brochures in hotel lobbies, and not so much as make eye contact with a concierge. All my decisions would be based on advice from TripAdvisor, Yelp, Chowhound, Wikitravel, and other online travel communities.

In Seattle, I would depend on the kindness of strangers.

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The van eventually let me off at the Sixth Avenue Inn. I had chosen this hotel after reading through exhaustive user write-ups on TripAdvisor, which has more than 2 million reviews posted by everyday travelers. It piqued my interest not because the travelers raved about the place—it was ranked 80th out of 115 Seattle hotels—but because the conditions some described were so colorfully deplorable. (Also, one review was titled "Stinky and dirty, but otherwise great," which appealed to me with its koan-like quality.) I was curious whether Trip Advisors could be trusted to know a bad hotel room when they saw one.

Reading through the reviews was time-consuming—by my count, there were about 5,000 words, or nearly three times the length of this article, of commentary about just this single hotel. But the reading wasn't particularly burdensome. Clicking through the reviews is a sort of guilty pleasure, like leafing through magazines that have only unkind things to say about celebrities. Reviewers seem most inclined to log on when they have complaints, and they almost always mention small, novelistic details of the sort you don't find in traditional travel guides.

Of the Sixth Avenue Inn, for instance, one reviewer reported that the guest rooms smelled of "a mixture of smoke and various bodily odors that apparently mixed into the establishment over the years." Another wrote, "I mistook a bath towel for a hand towel because the towels were so small." On they went: "My first night I awoke to water pouring through the ceiling in my bathroom"; "I slept fully clothed and wore socks at all times. The shower was gross"; and "If Todd happens to be your waiter, you'll also get entertainment" (it was unclear whether this was a good or a bad thing). A reviewer also noted that the pillows were "uncomfortably flat."

The information online is often piping fresh—some of these reviews had been written just days before I arrived. (Indeed, I had decided against another hotel based on a recently posted account of a child sneezing lavishly in the whirlpool, "using the water as his tissue.") What's more, the site allows you to post "candid traveler photos." Future historians will be pleased to discover that no hotel carpet stain has gone undocumented.

I opened the door to my room with mild trepidation. But it turns out that the Sixth Avenue Inn is absolutely fine. Not fancy, but fine. The shower was not gross. I could detect no unfamiliar bodily odors. The pillows did not strike me as unusually flat. I met no one named Todd. And the end of the toilet paper was even folded into a crisp equilateral triangle, the international symbol of hygienic attention. I slept well.

The next morning, I opened my laptop and fired up Google Earth, punched in the address of the hotel, and parachuted down from outer space. If you watch a dog in an unfamiliar place, it

THE TRIP ADVISORY: TUNE IN, TURN LEFT

Dozens of social-networking and user-generated sites on the Web cater to travelers. Here are some that I used in Seattle:

Google Earth (earth.google.com) is available as a free download for Windows and Macs. Travel information is embedded in many of the overlays created by various Google Earth communities.

TripAdvisor.com, which is owned by Expedia, has exhaustive (and sometimes exhausting) user-generated reviews of hotels around the world, along with comments on attractions and restaurants.

Chowhound.com has active message boards for more than 50 destinations and topics (such as "kosher food"), with reports on dining spots that offer everything from $200-per-person wine pairings to $2 hot dogs.

Yelp.com is a general-interest board with postings on restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, bars, and the like in dozens of U.S. cities. Judging by the preponderance of exclamation points, the site attracts a younger crowd.

Ning.com is a social network in which users can create their own communities. Search for the place you're headed, ask questions, or just listen in on local chatter.

VirtualTourist.com organizes posts by tidy categories ("off the beaten path," "restaurants," "local customs"), with dozens of user reviews for many of the most popular spots.

IgoUgo.com is owned by the same people who own Travelocity and has an active community of 350,000-plus members who contribute well-considered reviews, many written in the manner of traditional guidebooks.

Wayfaring.com is a map-based Web site where users can annotate destinations and upload photos of their travels, descriptions of their favorite restaurants, and so on. The interface can be aggravating.

TripWiser.com offers handy templates for creating trip journals and posting short reviews; registered users can organize their itineraries based on recommendations from other travelers, or just follow in their footsteps. Recent offerings include "4 Days Around Jackson Hole" and "10-Day London & Paris Oooolala!"

RealTravel.com has a more global orientation than many other sites, and permits browsing of posts by destination or "things to do" (e.g., "diving & snorkeling," "food & wine").

MyTripJournal.com does as it suggests: provides a place to post accounts of one's travels. The interface is designed more for the writers and the people tracking them than for strangers seeking information.

43Places.com is a social-networking site that allows users to "share stories about places in your city and around the world," but the site architecture results in a fairly random grab bag of facts and opinions.

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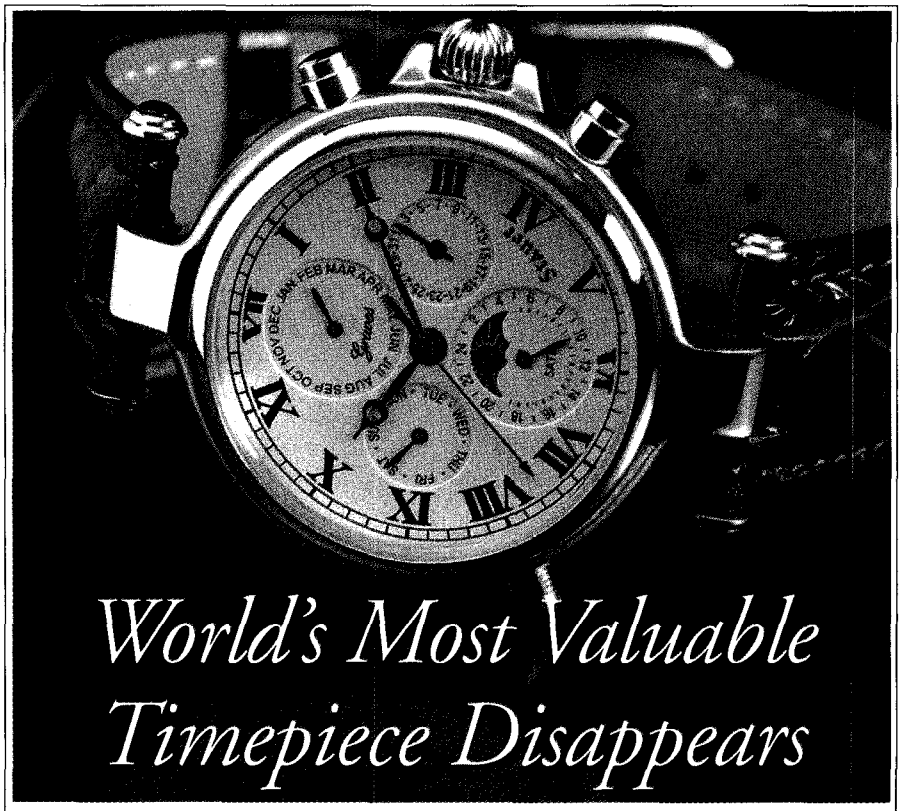
may loop around in expanding concentric rings, sniffing at everything, to orient itself. With some variation—less sniffing, more fretting about where to get a good cup of coffee—that's pretty much how I explore a new place.

And that's why I love Google Earth. A traditional travel guide—as heavy as a brick and requiring tedious consulting of an index—feels like 15th-century technology, which, of course, it is. Once you put yourself in the crosshairs on Google Earth (it always looks as if you're about to be hit by a guided missile), you can explore what's nearby simply by toggling various overlays. Click on *dining*, and the map is suddenly aclutter with knife-and-fork symbols. Click on *coffee shops*, and little coffee cups bloom like algae. Then dig deeper: click on the symbols, and brief reviews pop up.

Some of these data sets are licensed from professional providers—the American Institute of Architects list of the 150 most-loved American buildings is one—but I stuck with user-generated data, mostly from Wikipedia, Google Earth communities, and Yelp. (I used the Yelp overlay extensively, only to discover two weeks after I returned that its cheerful Partridge Family–like icons had vanished from Google Earth because of licensing issues. They may or may not return, but the 1.7 million reviews posted to date are still accessible at www.yelp.com.) While toggling around the neighborhood, I discovered that I was a short walk from the proto-Starbucks, the very first in the chain. I set off and minutes later stood gazing at an unassuming storefront, vaguely aware that something was amiss. Then it dawned on me: the original Starbucks sign was brown, rather than the ubiquitous green. Freakish! But isn't this what travel is all about—discovering that the familiar is suddenly unfamiliar?

The biggest downside of Travel 2.0 is the surfeit of information—how do you sort through all this detail and random advice? The number of social-networking sites catering to travelers is staggering. Among them: Ning.com, VirtualTourist.com, IgoUgo.com, Wayfaring.com, and



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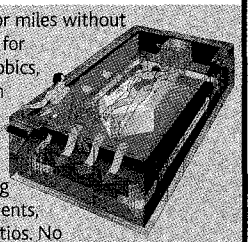

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TripWiser.com. I visited many, looking for ideas on how to fill my day; most offered tidy graphics but little or no content for Seattle. Other sites—among them RealTravel.com, MyTripJournal.com, and 43Places.com—encourage travelers to post trip diaries, in part to keep friends and family apprised of their journeys. Feeling slightly voyeuristic, I looked at these for ideas, too.

After a mere three or four hours of clicking, I mapped out an itinerary, which included Smith Tower and its 35th-floor observation deck and the outdoor-equipment retail behemoth REI ("Your [*sic*] first greeted by an amazing waterfall that truncates next to the outdoor hiking trail that the employees and customers use to test out mountain bikes"). I caught a bus to the Fremont neighborhood, lured by the prospect of seeing a statue of Lenin, a Cold War–era rocket attached to a restaurant, and, under a bridge, a squat concrete troll crushing a Volkswagen. Everything lived up to its billing, and then some.

The most useful site was Chowhound.com, a discussion board for the food-obsessed, which I've used for several years. (A new interface added in 2006 makes it much easier to search past posts.) It was launched with an emphasis on cheap eats but now hosts a diverse, committed, and generally knowledgeable community of foodies, who post fewer maddeningly uninformative comments of the sort found elsewhere. (Like this one, from a review of a Seattle restaurant on IgoUgo.com: "The elegant decor tips you off that you are about to have a food experience.")

For travelers, as for so many other Web users, the Internet is great for finding the needle in the haystack. But it's not so good at finding the haystack—at culling infinite possibilities into a manageable list of options. What I like most about Chowhound is the propensity of reviewers to provide a cluster of choices—the five best seafood restaurants, the best bars for a cocktail. (The latter, incidentally, led me to Zig Zag Café, easily one of the best bars for a serious cocktail fancier that I've found anywhere—classic drinks, no attitude.) Chowhound, like many of the Travel 2.0 sites, is in fact best approached like a cocktail party: you can learn more by eavesdropping here and there than by tracking any one conversation. There's rarely a consensus, so it's best just to skim through. At the very least, you'll come away knowing which restaurants have recently changed chefs and may be on unsteady legs, and which new places might be worth a gamble.

My adventures weren't without glitches, of course. In Fremont, for example, I looked forward to lunch at El Camino, a Mexican restaurant that several of my virtual friends had recommended. But it wasn't open for lunch. Nobody's paid to add the essential minutiae on Travel 2.0, such as when establishments are open. Or even whether a place still exists—I came upon a few phantom restaurants, making me wonder whether amateur traveler sites will eventually become boneyards of failed enterprises unless paid updaters occasionally police the neighborhood.

Near the end of my stay, I wandered down to the Seattle Public Library, Rem Koolhaas's 2004 glass-and-steel structure famous for its exoskeleton. Not only is it one of the AIA's 150 most-loved buildings (OK, I peeked), but several travelers had suggested a stop there. ("I highly recommend visiting the library if you come to Seattle, even if you think libraries are big yawn-factories," wrote Corry on RealTravel.com. "The reading room was rad because it was giant, beautiful, and every single desk had a multitude of outlets so you'd never have to worry about not being able to plug-in.")

Outside, the building looked like a Transformer unfolding into something as yet undetermined; inside, it was a beautiful soaring cathedral of information, with sherbet-colored escalators and elevators and vertigo-inspiring interior vistas. "Rad" might even be an understatement.

I sat down at a desk, took out my laptop, and plugged in. It was as perfect a spot as I could imagine to set out in search of a place for dinner.

Wayne Curtis is a frequent contributor to *The Atlantic*.

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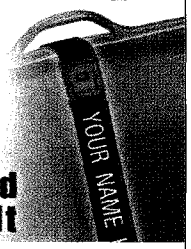

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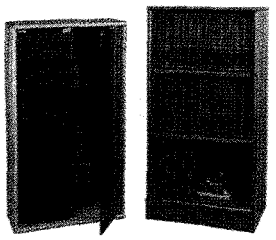

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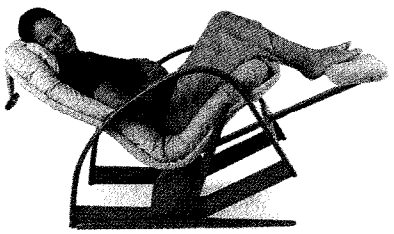

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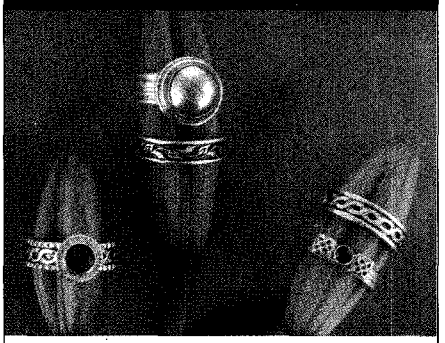

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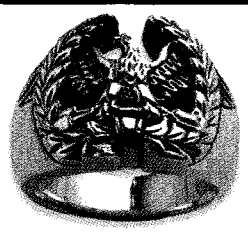

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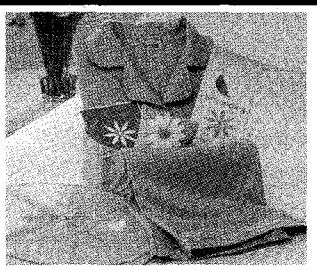

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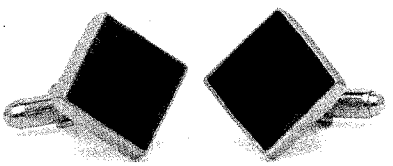

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FOOD

One man's mission to save abandoned (and glorious) apples by helping people plant for the future

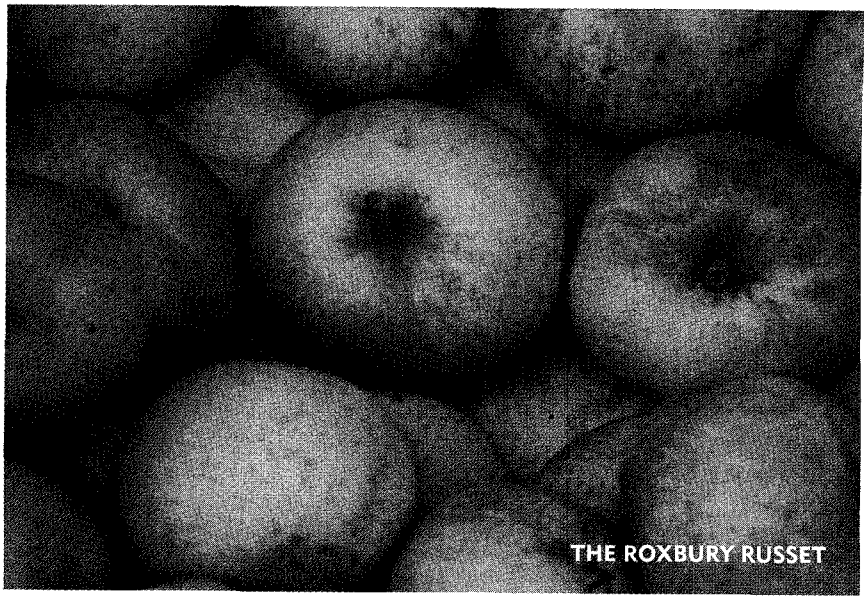
Beyond the McIntosh

BY CORBY KUMMER

"There's the joint," John Bunker said, pointing to a neat line circling what looked like a long twig on an apple tree. The line, which marked the most recent year's growth, would have been invisible to me. Once he pointed it out, the deep mulberry red of the scion wood, as the new growth is called, was indeed distinct from the increasingly dulled chestnut of the twig, branch, and trunk.

Faint as it was, to Bunker's practiced eye the line might as well have been illuminated, and the new growth traffic-light red. His life's mission, as he discovered it 30 years ago, is to find and rescue apple varieties from the backyard orchards that once were part of every New England farm. He is an apple whisperer, locating the lone strip of live bark on a hundred-year-old-tree, detecting the ruddy new growth that would elude others, and grafting the captured scion wood onto a healthy tree to bring what might be a wonderful old apple back to life.

Bunker tracks down not just very old trees but very old farmers who know the one tree in town bearing the prized local apple named for the town or the family that grew it. Two of his most helpful sources have been apple collectors named Earland Goodhue and Francis Fenton, who are each about to turn 92. People travel from remote wooded parts of Maine (which is to say most of it), the state where Bunker has lived for 40 years, to present him with orphan apples from trees on their property. Like found pets, the neglected trees seem to beg for adoption. Someone once planted and pruned them, and taught succeeding generations how to tend them. But then a link was broken, and the apple lost its name. Now visitors line up at country fairs to ask Bunker the name of their apple, and in the winter months boxes come in the mail bearing more mystery apples from all over the Northeast, for a total of 300 apple challenges a year.



THE ROXBURY RUSSET

JON ROWLEY

People know Bunker as an apple man because he grafts and sells about 10,000 fruit trees a year—only full-sized trees, not the high-yielding dwarves that populate today's "pedestrian orchards," which are easy to prune and pick but fragile of health, shallow of root, and relatively short-lived. This is Bunker's way of carrying on the largely abandoned heritage he found when he bought part of an old farm in the town of Palermo with two friends and moved onto it within a month of finishing college. He had spent his boyhood in Concord, Massachusetts, imagining a Thoreauvian future for himself (he lived a short hike from Walden Pond); when he went to summer camp on an island in Maine, he knew where that future would be.

His vocation arrived in a bushel basket, when he was managing a food cooperative in the town of Belfast. A man named Ira Proctor walked in one day to ask if the co-op would sell some of his apples on consignment. Bunker had never seen their like: apples the shape of a perfect McIntosh (a variety widely planted in Maine only after a calamitous freeze killed more than a million trees in 1934) but colored a lustrous dark cordovan, purple-black with firm, cream-colored flesh. The flavor was refreshing, smooth, and all apple—not cloying and mealy, as Macs can be, and not firm and juicy but as flavorful as cardboard, like Red Delicious. It was not a sour "quick spitter," as Maine farmers call many apples, nor light-flavored with faint hints of pineapple and banana, like many of the heirlooms Bunker had encountered in his wanderings. This was a great apple, and a very beautiful one besides. The name was Black Oxford, Proctor told

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him, for the county where it grew: it originated in Paris, Maine, around 1790. Bunker took them all, and resolved to grow some for himself.

He knew he wouldn't find Black Oxfords in any catalog. Apples do not "come true" from seed, so anyone who wants to taste a wild apple again must learn to graft it. The millions of seedlings that grew from the seeds colonists brought from England—varieties meant for hard cider, not for eating—gave rise to what Bunker calls the "greatest breeding experiment" in history. Johnny Appleseed, whose real name was John Chapman, did not graft any of the apples he brought with him on his treks westward from New England, because his Swedenborgian Church viewed grafting exactly as many religions today view genetic engineering: only God could create an apple. (He sold them, as seedlings.) But farmers all over the United States did graft and name the apples they liked, sharing them with neighbors and friends and sometimes registering the names in order to sell them. By the end of the 19th century, Bunker says, nurseries offered hundreds of the more than 10,000 named American varieties, some of which became popular exports to Europe (which was doing intense pomology work of its own, particularly France).

A century later, the intense work was in discovering the origin of apples. Much of it was led by a horticulturist named Phil Forsline, based at the Agricultural Research Service in Geneva, New York. Forsline's expeditions to Kazakhstan, where he followed up on the work of the legendary Russian plant geneticist Nikolai Vavilov, made headlines in the 1990s, when it seemed that he was hot on the trail of the garden of Eden. The history of this research, including Vavilov's torture and death in a prison and the story of Aimak Djangaliev, the conflicted man who carried on his work, is elegantly described in Frank Browning's 1998 *Apples*. Browning, a correspondent for NPR, grew up on a commercial family orchard in Kentucky; the book reflects his lifelong interest in the world's apples, and includes much on Forsline's work. Last year Bunker wrote and published an engaging account of his own searches, *Not Far From the Tree*, to benefit the Palermo Historical Society.

Like many amateur and professional American pomologists, Bunker followed Forsline's research, and as he launched his own, he sometimes asked for scion wood from the Geneva lab, which is generous in supplying it. But his experiments in planting apples for himself and for friends didn't go very well. The trouble, he realized, was that he was using trees "from away," ordered from a big national supplier. The advent of the Black Oxford convinced him to abandon apples from anywhere outside his adopted state—and to abandon, too, any dreams he might have spun of following in Forsline's adventurous footsteps. His Kazakhstan would be the universe of Palermo and the family farms abandoned all over the state. He might find apples as great as the Black Oxford. He would certainly find apples that knew how to grow in their own soil.

I was watching Bunker not so I could learn to graft but so I could plant a tree of my own. The one look, and taste, I got of a Black Oxford at the house where Bunker spends the winter—in Concord, on Thoreau Court—made me start dreaming, even if my own experiments at gardening have been striking mostly for their inverse relationship between enthusiasm and results. Like a second marriage, planting a tree would be a triumph of hope over experience.

I asked Bunker for advice and more tastes. He was about to return to Maine to collect scion wood—he does it in early March, at the end of the trees' dormancy—and start preparations for the annual April shipping frenzy. The ideal time to plant is on a warm, cloudy May morning. He found more than 10 varieties in his Maine root cellar, all of them still edible, for me to try.

The apples that found homes in New England backyards would last much of the winter in cold, damp storage (a root cellar should be about 34 degrees and

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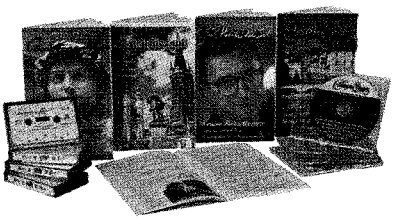

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have about 80 percent humidity, roughly like a refrigerator produce drawer), and were resistant to local insects and blight. Commercially valuable varieties had these virtues, and also looks and durability—the requisites whose reductio ad absurdum is the Red Delicious.

To be fair, flavor was never very high on anyone's list. Guides like the revered 1905 two-volume *Apples of New York*, by S. A. Beach, are "terrible" at describing flavor, Bunker told me, adding that he still keeps copies in both Palermo and Concord. Apple guides seldom go beyond "tart," "sweet," "good," and "best," he said; he wants to take a wine course to help with the always vexing question of how to describe flavors. He already provides sprightly descriptions in his annual catalog, which features a rotating cast of a few dozen apples he sells every year. (You can download it at www.fedcoseeds.com/trees.htm. Another helpful and very readable reference is Ben Watson's *Cider, Hard and Sweet*, and a good general resource is www.applejournal.com.) To illustrate the sins of the fathers, Bunker brought back a Ben Davis—the Red Delicious of its day, known for its beauty and indestructibility and shipped by the barrel to England, an avid consumer. Mainers knew the Ben Davis as an apple that, as Virginia Dowe, the owner of a country store, remarked to Bunker, "tastes like cardboard in November and cardboard in May." To me it seemed a firm, less-juicy Mac, an apple I've never had much use for.

Other apples had interesting hints of vanilla and tropical fruits, especially pineapple—hints that are prized in today's vogue for heirloom apples but that reminded me of the reservations I have about many tropical fruits, which are valuable more for their exotic looks than for their too-delicate flavor. I want an apple that tastes like one. Like, say, the Pomme Grise, a wonderfully fragrant, meaty little dessert apple I couldn't stop eating, with a pretty, dove-gray russeted skin. I always gravitate toward russeted apples—meaning those with a dulled, rough skin—as they generally have spicy, superior flavor. I asked Bunker for all the Golden Russets he could spare from the stock he'd brought back, for their exemplary russeted virtues and alluring hint of clove.

That preference led me to the apple Bunker wanted me to plant, and away from the one I wanted to—the stunning Black Oxford, which, if pressed, he admits is his favorite. Even in late winter, it had quintessential apple flavor. But many factors go into deciding which tree to plant, Bunker reminded me: when the apple is at its best (anywhere from August until March; winter apples come into their own in storage), the tree's resistance to disease, and whether you want to make pies, sauce, or cider, or just eat apples out of hand.

> The only attitude to take, Bunker tells novices, is to treat a fruit tree like your own child, enjoying every stage of its growth.

And, of course, a tree will take several years to bear. The only attitude to take, Bunker tells novices, is to treat a fruit tree like your own child, enjoying every stage of its growth. "When my daughter was five," he said, "was I thinking, *When is she going to have kids?*" A tree will take babying at the beginning: a sunny spot, some rock powder for the soil, weekly watering (Bunker gives encouraging and complete planting and care instructions in his catalog). But after that, aside from watching for pests and wrapping some window screen around the base of the trunk every winter, Bunker promised just the joys of a new parent, watching the "leafing out" the very first spring, the flowering the second or third, and steady growth with minimal care ("three hours a year for the deluxe treatment") until I

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would see fruit the fourth or fifth. True, not everyone who plants a tree gets to taste its fruits. But somebody will. And planting one will repay future generations, Bunker says, just as the farmers of Palermo gave him his life's work.

The usual final ship date for apple trees is April 30. Fedco has an annual sale, with all the leftover stock and experimental apples, which draws visitors to Clinton, Maine, from all over the Northeast (it is three and a half hours from Boston and an hour and a quarter from Portland); this year's is May 2–3. If you're unable to order a tree, you can start preparing the soil (Bunker gives directions) and set to dreaming with next year's catalog. And you can mark your calendar for Common Ground, a country fair in Unity, Maine, that will celebrate its 32nd year on the weekend of September 19. Here Bunker gives away apples by the basket, trying to lure visitors into discovering and perhaps planting heirlooms—like the Canadian Strawberry, which a visitor to the fair importuned Bunker to come and try. The apple was, he says, one of the best he's ever tasted, and now Bunker both sells and grows them. It doesn't keep, so you have to go to the fair to try one. I intend to.

And for my own future generations? Given my nonexistent gardening skill, Bunker told me to stick to an apple that has always grown well in my own native soil—always good advice, and no matter that I grew up somewhere else. "Where we are is our heritage," he says. So I've ordered an apple that originated in the 1600s one town away from Jamaica Plain, where I live—the Roxbury Russet, one of the three big apples of the 19th century. If it's anything like any other russet I've tasted, I know I'll be happy. And I'm already planning the next: another of the big three, the Rhode Island Greening (the third is the Baldwin, still widely grown but handsome, stolid, and dumb). A beautiful blue-green, like a Granny Smith with character, it's still the pie apple par excellence, and the one I grew up with. It's the apple I want to give the people I'll never meet.

Corby Kummer is an *Atlantic* senior editor.

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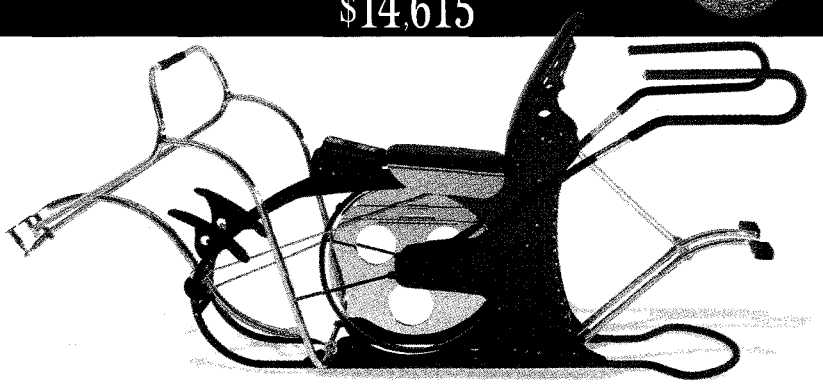

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CONTENT

The digital age demands that political candidates be authentic and accessible. But please—hold the carrots.

Only Connect

BY MICHAEL HIRSCHORN

RICHARD THOMPSON

"Let's do lunch," Hillary Clinton e-mailed me on Tuesday, September 4, at 11:18 a.m. For a narcissistic moment, I thought maybe she actually wanted to get together and was using a circa-1989 coinage (one that had slipped well past ironic-referential mode by 1994, roughly to where "That's how I roll" is today) as some kind of inside joke. We had, after all, met for about 30 seconds at a company-sponsored fund-raiser not long before, where my co-workers and I had been asked to wait in a long line in order to have a quick interchange with the candidate and then a grip-and-grin. We had snobbishly refused to get in line but then thought, *Why not? Maybe we can say one day that we met her.* It was ... brief. "Let's talk, you and me—about whatever you'd like," her e-mail went on, as if she were continuing our conversation. "Our hopes. Our goals. Our work. The weather. Maybe even politics." Then the clincher: "I think it would be fun to have you over for lunch, at my table, in my home in Washington." *Moi*?

On Thursday, September 6, at 11:19 a.m., Bill Clinton sent me a follow-up note. Apparently his wife had filled him in on the impending festivities. "Dear michael," he wrote, "I hear you might be having lunch with Hillary—do you mind if I drop in?" Wha-hey! This was turning out to be quite a party.

Turned out that *might* was the operative word. Only one supporter would be invited, along with a friend, and you had to donate to her campaign by midnight Friday to qualify. I declined. But Bill and I were getting quite chummy. On September 25, at 11:20 a.m., Mr. Hill got in touch again: "You, me, a TV, and a bowl of chips." The intimacy was making me sweat slightly. "There are two things in this world that I love more than anything else," he confided, "my family and politics. So you can imagine just how fired up I get when Hillary is on the stage debating the issues that matter to our country." I know, it's almost sexual. Bill was passing along the good news that three lucky Hillary supporters would be invited, each with a guest, to watch an upcoming debate. "We'll sit down in front of a big TV with a big bowl of chips, watch the debate, and talk about the race."

I didn't want to offend Bill, but what with his recent heart problems, maybe "a big bowl of chips" was not exactly what the doctor ordered. Hillary shared my concern, bless her heart, even in the middle of a heated primary campaign. Two days later, September 27, at 10:48 a.m., she couldn't contain herself any longer. "Dear michael," she wrote, urgency clearly visible between the lines. "I hear you might be watching a debate with Bill." Indeed, I might be. "Can I ask you a favor? Bill mentioned 'a big bowl of chips' in the email he sent you Tuesday. If you are one of the three people who get the chance to join him, can you make sure he eats carrots, not chips?"

It turns out that Glenda, Clare, and David were the three lucky winners of

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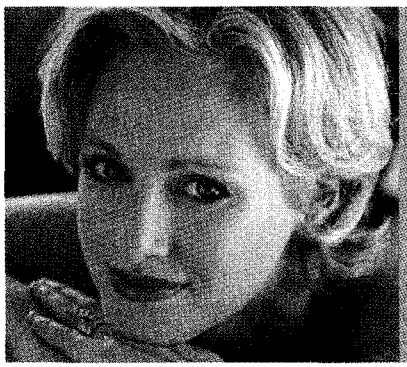

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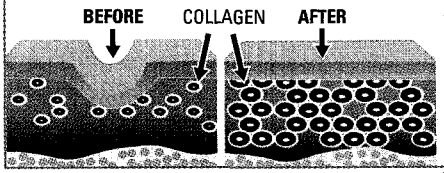

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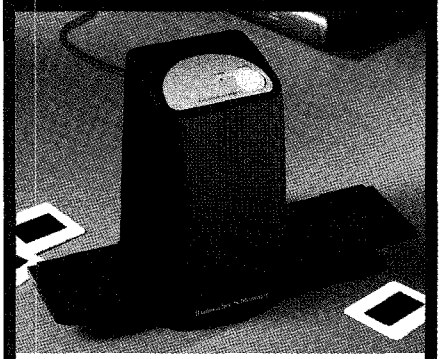

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the "bowl of chips" offer from Bill, as he helpfully informed me on November 6, at 2:16 p.m., in an e-mail titled "Glenda, Clare, and David" (Bill must've slept in—these e-mails were coming later now). He even sent along a link to a video of him and Glenda, Clare, and David watching Hillary debate. The video showed that there was more than just chips and carrots on offer, lovingly panning over peppers, pretzel sticks, and other evidence of a well-appointed spread. "Pizza!" Bill exclaimed as he walked in. And I was able to learn that Bill subsequently ate both chips (with dip!) and carrots as he watched his wife on the flat-screen TV. According to everyone in attendance, she did a great job. Bill helpfully pointed out to Glenda, Clare, and David how she countered but did not attack, and effused that the country was really looking for solutions, not empty rhetoric. After the debate, Hillary called in, and Bill put David on the phone. Since we all know that she worries, he made sure to tell her that he had gotten Bill to eat some carrots after all.

Really, who comes up with this nonsense? Sure, we all know that this is the "YouTube election." The Web has replaced TV, and e-mail has replaced direct mail, as the current modes of wholesale campaigning. Hillary's tone-deafness has been well explored and mocked, but her comprehensive misapprehension of how rapidly mutating media alter the way people communicate has not. The digital living room she was once going to fill with listening and sharing as she cakewalked to the nomination has become an altogether more dissonant gathering place. Thanks to some sort of undead-like invincibility, she is surviving, but certainly not to have the sort of chummy conversation she envisioned in those innocent fall e-mails. Like watching Nixon sweat on television in 1960, to read Hillary's e-mail today is to experience an old dispensation crashing headlong into the new. Clearly, someone at Hillary HQ—or, more likely, a highly paid consultant—spent serious time building a multiplatform, interactive strategy to swathe the electorate in the marital faux-togetherness of Bill and Hillary running for office. Someone thought, *Hey, let's really connect with the public and let them in on what it's truly like to be a candidate for president in 2008, dangle in front of them like a big pepperoni pizza the prospect of intimacy with a past and possibly future world leader.*

Like watching Nixon sweat on TV in 1960, to read Hillary's e-mail today is to experience an old dispensation crashing into the new.

There's a serious point here. For all the focus on position papers, and process, and even likability, what gets lost is that elections are ultimately about making connections; about showing the largest number of voters that you care about them; about, as they say in my world, *relatability*. Relatability is a function of discourse, which requires the candidate to speak in the vernacular of the moment. And what the era of YouTube and social media prizes is authenticity, improvisation, rough edges. Whether these values are genuinely held or brilliantly mimicked is immaterial. You have to bring the realness.

John McCain and Barack Obama turn out to be fantastic at realness; each offers up a kind of linguistic metanarrative that says—screams—"I am not a politician," or at least, "I'm not only a politician." Obama's admission in his 1995 autobiography that he did "a little blow" as a teenager may in retrospect have been his most brilliant campaign gambit, one that makes him of this moment (confessional, flawed, post-Boomer, ultimately untouchable on questions of honesty because he already admitted to something no

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candidate has ever admitted to before) the way Bill Clinton's "I didn't inhale" nonadmission (Boomerish, entitled, prone to sanctimonious deployments of situational ethics) made him quintessentially of his. Authenticity now is more coded, in the sense that the politician needs to have an intuitive understanding of how to converse, what to concede, what to hide, and what the Web hive will and will not validate.

As we contemplate Hillary's persistent outré-ness, it's worth dwelling on the ways in which she so misunderstood this moment. She is a politician who can never get out of the way of her politicianness; even her efforts to recast her campaign as a "conversation" reeked of politician. Last summer, the Clintons' YouTube quasi-parody of the *Sopranos* finale initially seemed audacious, a witty surfacing of the repressed subtext of the couple's Mob-dynastic ambitions and less-than-fully-intact marital status, until it devolved to more shtick about Bill's diet. Perhaps the Clintons didn't get their own joke? The campaign proceeded to become more and more obtuse about the Bill-Hillary dynamic until the subtext—was Bill undermining his wife's candidacy?—drowned out the official text. Despite those grasping and un-fun appearances on *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live* (required stops on the political self-flagellation circuit), it remains hard to find the human being inside, to break through Hillary's carefully wrought positional scrim.

The word *conversation* implies at least some form of interactivity. But as Frank Rich has pointed out repeatedly and hilariously, Hillary's spontaneous interactions with the public have all the improvisational élan of a Fortune 500 earnings call. On her Web chats, the viewer questions might as well be submitted by voterbots. Hillary answers in fully formed paragraphs that double as nonnarcotic sedatives.

The numbing perfection of Hillary's self-ideation makes you hate her even when you like her. Who can read the teaser for another YouTube video without throwing up a little inside his

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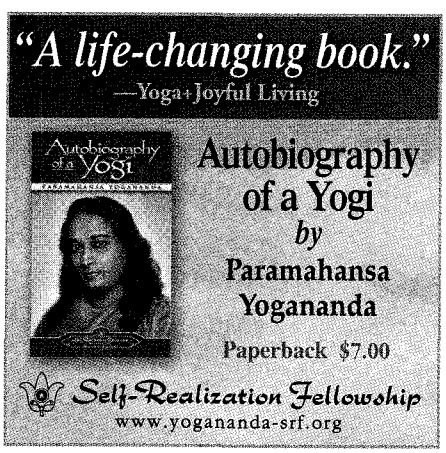

mouth?: "She'll never stop fighting for those who fight for us, and give voice to those who have none." Never? Even when she's busy giving Americans the health-care choices they deserve and need?

We understand intuitively why this discourse comes off as so wooden, so content-less, even in its relentless gravitas, but why is it so off-putting now? The answer has to do with how digital culture has made us all skeptics, all Swift Boaters. There is not one affectation, one biographical detail, that now can survive the relentless interrogation of bloggers, oppo researchers, amateur videographers, data miners. This digital Panopticon has in turn bred a culture of preemptive self-revelation, a race to bare body and essence: *Hey, I did a little blow!*

Obama's weaknesses may lie in the realm of substance and experience, but his self-revelatory style has so far served to obfuscate these potential problems. Paradoxically for a generational totem, his speeches are overtly retro, harking back to FDR and Reagan. But in interviews, he speaks in English, as an actual smart person might in normal conversation. Can you imagine Hillary saying anything as introspective, sophisticated about racial identity, and in its own way daring, as what Barack recently told *Vanity Fair*? "You know," he said, referring to his high-school basketball career in Hawaii, "I had an overtly black game, behind-the-back passes, and wasn't particularly concerned about fundamentals, whereas our coach was this Bobby Knight guy, and he was all about fundamentals—you know, bounce passes, and four passes before you shoot, and that sort of thing." That such a comment, which 15 years ago might have caused real controversy, went without notice is evidence of how Obama's seeming artlessness has at least temporarily reconfigured the traditional gotcha relationship between candidate and press. There's nothing to reveal when the candidate ingeniously seems to be revealing everything. His Web site, like McCain's, is noticeably free of feigned closeness. Meanwhile, McCain's temper, his erratic qualities, his politically incorrect jokes (even that lame Beach Boys "Bomb Iran" crack), his forthright, often combative speeches, suddenly make him more authentic, more *now*, more Greatest Generation 2.0. McCain understood this new culture of authenticity intuitively even during the 2000 election, when he branded his campaign the "Straight Talk Express." In this endlessly mediated age, even authenticity is a form of branding. Indeed, precisely because we live in an era of endlessly manipulable images, authenticity is the most truly prized brand attribute. But McCain, 100 percent authentic or not, has compellingly sold realness, and may do so all the way to the White House.

This is why an Obama-McCain match-up would be the most engrossing in recent memory: not only an opportunity to see two master communicators go at each other but a chance to alter political discourse for good. The old political speech has started sounding so canned that we literally cannot hear it. I could listen to Hillary all day without really understanding a word she says. It's not just the unearned intimacy; it's the way everything seems manipulated and focus-tested by teams of professionals to the point where it becomes a kind of elision, a non-speak.

In early March, Obama sent me an e-mail. It presumed no intimacy. It was titled "Will you make a call for me?" And it asked me to call six people, and, if needed, employ a script that I could access on his Web site. The theme of the e-mail was "connection," and the idea behind it was that voters would be swayed more by hearing from their fellow voters than from the candidate directly. "The most extraordinary things happen at the personal level, when you can make that personal connection to a voter and discover that you share a common vision of what ought to be," the e-mail read. "Make a call and make that connection today." In its frank way, the strategy recalled the chain letters we received as kids, but it also got to the heart of what a digital-era campaign could be: honest about its agenda, distributed, connected. A conversation, even.

Michael Hirschorn is an *Atlantic* contributing editor.

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The University of Virginia

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Christopher James Klingbeil
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The University of Iowa

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3rd Prize
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Tracy Isaacs
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WORD FUGITIVES

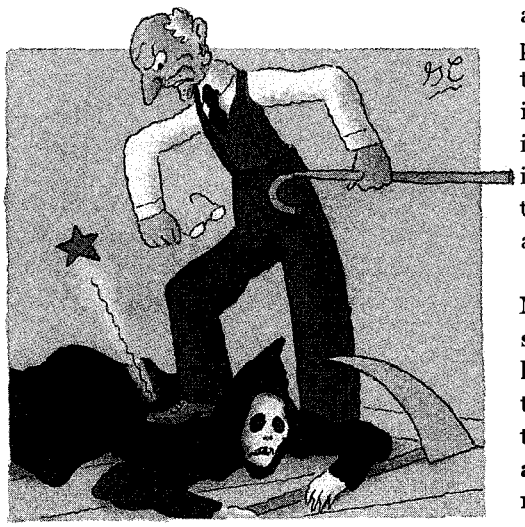
BY BARBARA WALLRAFF

In December, a reader going through a divorce requested a word for his soon-to-be-ex—a sort of opposite of *fiancé(e)*. *Unintended, detrothed, fleeancé(e), financé(e), prevorcé(e), future former*, and the text-message-friendly *ex-to-be (x2b)* were some of the most popular suggestions. Karina Borowicz, of Strafford, N.H., came up with *departner*; Matthew Clark, of Boston, *ex pre facto*; and Robert Flint, of Cambridge, Mass., *dumpling*.

Christal Smith, of Los Angeles, wrote, "I go the acronym route, so *Soon To Be Ex-Husband* becomes *STBEH*—pronounced 'stubby,' which has the built-in benefit of making him wince whenever I use it." Mary K. D. D'Rozario, of Raleigh, N.C., wrote, "My state requires one year of separation for no-fault divorce, during which time I referred to my husband as my *exish*. It rarely required explanation."

Chandler Fulton, of New York City, turned his thoughts to metaphor. He wrote, "A soon-to-be-ex is one who retains the title of husband or wife but has effectively surrendered any attendant power or privileges—in other words, a *lame-duck spouse*." Partly but not entirely because this is an election year, Fulton takes top honors.

The other December request was for a word that means "to tarry beyond one's welcome" or "to live an excessively long life." John Bradley, of San Jose, Calif., wrote, "Your correspondent might not be pleased to know that the word she seeks already exists. It is *cunctate*, more familiar in its noun form *cunctator*. Although lesser dictionaries give it the abbreviated meaning of 'delayer or procrastinator,' the *Oxford English Dictionary* will inform that it was once more commonly used to mean 'one who delays past the appropriate time for departure.' One elderly and probably senile Byzantine emperor who would neither abdicate in favor of his highly regarded heir nor just conveniently die was nicknamed Felix Cunctator." Great word and a good tale—but, John, you know that hardly any of it's true, right? *Cunctator* does mean "one who acts tardily, a delayer," to quote the *OED*'s definition in its entirety, and



classical history did give us a "Cunctator," but he was a Roman military commander, Quintus Fabius Maximus, who earned the epithet by being slow to deploy troops against Hannibal.

William A. Parks Jr., of Covington, Va., called "living an excessively long life" "a rather repulsively morbid and judgmental concept" but went on to suggest *extravive* and *hypervive* as coinages that could convey it. For the "tarry beyond one's welcome" part of the idea, he invented a different word: *tarryover*.

In fact, many suggestions that came in failed to cover the whole territory. Bridget Hellstrom, of Arlington Heights, Ill., wrote, "People who have reached a very old age are not just over the hill but *over the mountain*." Kathleen DeBold, of Burtonsville, Md., wrote, "The clueless folks left over at a party after the other guests are gone have a special name: *remainduhs*."

A coinage that does everything requested came from James Tuten, of Huntingdon, Pa. Tuten wrote, "The late Senator Strom Thurmond arguably outlived his stay in American politics—certainly he defied expectations. In his honor: such a person is a *Strombulist*." And the activity is *Strombulism*, and to engage in it is to *Strombulize*. Let's stick with the political theme this month and award Tuten top honors.

Now PATRICIA COCKRAM, of Jackson Heights, N.Y., writes, "I'm looking for a word that describes things (like ATMs or drugstores) that seem ubiquitous when you aren't looking for them but that are nowhere to be found when you are."

And JAMES MONACK, of Washington, D.C., writes, "I need a word for an attempt, using facial expressions, to make a stranger's baby smile."

Send words that meet Patricia Cockram's or James Monack's needs to Word Fugitives, The Atlantic, *P.O. Box 67375, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, or visit the Word Fugitives page on our Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/fugitives. Submissions must be received by May 31. Use the same addresses to submit word fugitives that you'd like* The Atlantic's *help in finding. Letters become the property of Word Fugitives and may be edited.*

Readers whose queries are published and those whose words are singled out for top honors will each receive, with our thanks, More Words That Make a Difference, *by Robert and Carol Greenman; and my own* Word Fugitives.

GREG CLARKE

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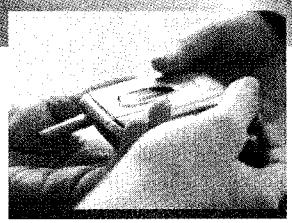

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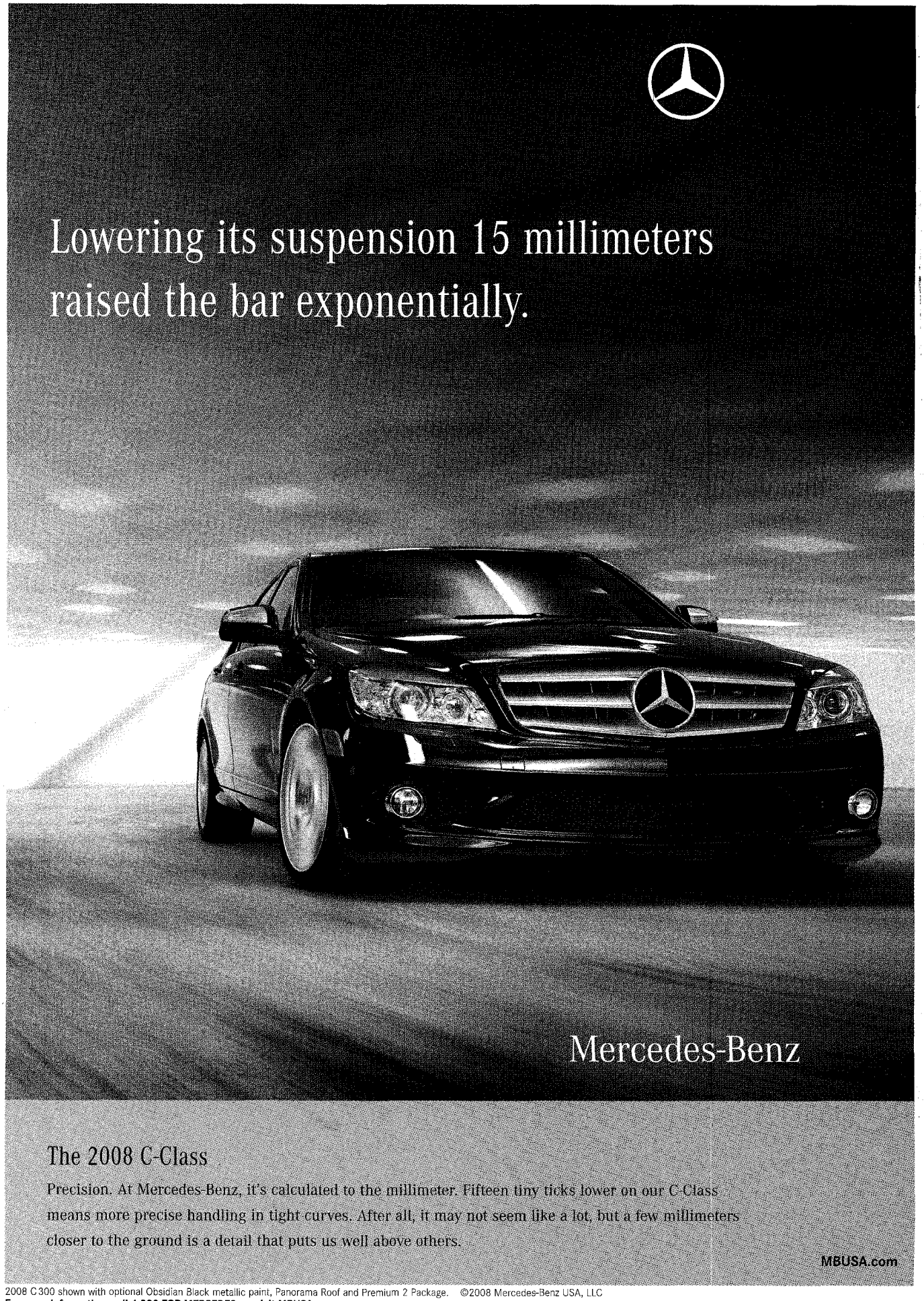

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